

<http://divergences.be/spip.php?article1679>



Richard Greeman

Contextualizing the Threat of Radical Islam (2)

- Archives - Archives Générales 2006 - 2022 - 2010 - N° 19 Mars 2010 - English -

Date de mise en ligne : Tuesday 16 March 2010

Copyright © Divergences Revue libertaire en ligne - All rights reserved

Moslem Disunity

Returning to Political Islam today, it is obvious that for a movement to be a serious threat to the imperialist West, it must be coherent and united, which is simply not the case here. A united militant Islamic ME/A world would indeed be a serious threat to the West, but nothing like that is in the offing, with the result that 'Political Islam,' divided, remains weak and ineffectual. So much for the Clash of Civilizations theories, based on ideology rather than concrete history. To be sure, Islamicist terror is a very serious daily threat to its principle victims, Moslem civilians in the ME/A lands, as well as to its more occasional victims, civilians in Western cities. But the actually existing Islamisms within the divided Moslem world represent no serious threat to U.S./Western hegemony, only obstacles to its control of the extraction and transit of petroleum.

http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L400xH239/Manif_Gaza_9061-c1e29.jpg

The most dramatic evidence of continuing Moslem impotence is the freedom and impunity with which Israel was able to invade first southern Lebanon in 2006 and then Gaza in 2008-09, deploying massive bombardments of civilian areas and scandalous attacks on schools, ambulances, and hospitals. Ostensibly Moslem pro-Western authoritarian states like, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco et al. responded to these brutal aggressions 'by tacitly supporting Israel's offensive in the hope of weakening a resistance movement which they see as a proxy for Iran and Syria. [1] Egypt has even closed its border with Gaza to humanitarian aid. Only when faced with huge spontaneous pro-Palestinian street demonstrations at home did these U.S.-propped 'Moslem' despotisms eventually consent to send some aid for the rebuilding of Gaza.

Similarly, the U.S. occupiers in Iraq have successfully played the imperial divide-and-rule game by paying off Sunni militias to 'keep order' and serve as a counterforce to the restive Shiite majority. Likewise in Afghanistan, the victorious 2001 U.S. invasion was made possible by the divide-and-rule tactic of arming the Northern Alliance of Islamic warlords from the ethnic Tadjik, Usbeck, Hasara nations against the Taliban government, whose ethnic base is the Pashtun nation, large but still a minority. However the Pashtuns' territory bleeds far into Pakistan, and the U.S.-supported Pakistani government quietly supports the Pashtun/Taliban cause in Afghanistan (though not within its own borders) so as to undermine a rival Afghan state allied with Pakistan's nemesis India. This is a situation of immense complexity in which regional inter-state conflict and ethnic/national rivalry on the ground apparently trump religion. [2]

http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L400xH206/Manif_Gaza_9036-c1175.jpg

Thus, put to the empirical test, the concept of the 'Islamic threat' as a unified actor simply falls apart – or rather dissolves into a nebulous. The word 'nebulous' is apt, because it suggests a swarm of bees, in this case angry Islamic bees, including heavily armed Shiite wasps and Sunni hornets. Now the trick around bees is to move slowly and leave them alone. They become a 'threat' only when you stir them up, which is exactly what Obama is doing in Afghanistan and now Pakistan and Yemen. It has become obvious to the world that every time the U.S. bombs Moslem civilians (or allows Israel to bomb Palestinian civilians) the imperialists create new Islamic militants who rise up and join the growing swarms of 'political Islam.' Indeed, news anchor Tom Brokaw recently described what the US was engaged in as the 'war against Islamic rage.' Would it not then be fair to conclude that in some non-metaphorical sense Western imperialism creates 'the threat of political Islam' ?

<http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L240xH320/superman-1-fb7c1.jpg>

How the Islamic Virus Broke Out of the Imperialist Laboratory

To sum up, so far we have seen that linguistically the concept of 'Islamism' is a product of the Orientalizing Western imagination and that it fits into a longstanding paradigm of demonizing the inferior, yet threatening 'other' (Indians, Negroes, anarchist immigrant laborers). We have also observed that empirically speaking the concept 'political Islam'

Contextualizing the Threat of Radical Islam (2)

does not qualify as a unified actor, and that its strength grows in reaction to each new Western outrage (invasions, bombings, kidnappings, assassinations, torture) against Moslem states and populations that resist U.S. hegemony over their oil and strategic position in the Great Game. We have also observed how this contested concept has been mobilized for propaganda purposes in order to justify unpopular, hugely expensive oil wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and now Pakistan. Functionally speaking, the War on (Islamic) Terror, like the War on Drugs, provides a blank check for domestic repression and foreign aggression. Indeed, if we can be permitted to paraphrase Voltaire's remark about God, if Islamism didn't exist we would have to invent it.

In what concrete ways can it be said that the West 'invents' what it calls Islamism? As we have seen, contemporary imperialism inadvertently spreads Islamic militantism by stirring up the ME/A hornets' nest through torture-camps and attacks on civilians. But Western agents have long supported Islamic movements in the region as a way to divert nationalism and democracy. Historically, the British Intelligence Service nurtured the Islamicist movement at its very origin. Said Aburish and Caroline Fourest among others have documented how the Moslem Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928, was encouraged by the British as a diversion against Egyptian secular movements for labor rights, democracy and national independence. Likewise, and the strict Wahhabi Islam of Saudi Arabia, encouraged by the British and then the Americans, has long been the main political prop of the despotic pro-Western Saudi monarchy — itself an invention of British colonialism. [3] This convenient relationship provides immense royalties to the U.S./British oil companies operating in Saudi Arabia as well as lucrative sales of F-16's to protect the Saudi royals from their benighted subjects — an imperialist sweetheart deal if there ever was one. No one seems to notice that Saudi Arabia, like Hamas which it has historically financed, remains an Islamic state which refuses to recognize the state of Israel. And although the Western media occasionally react to such barbaric incidents as the beheading of a young princess for the crime of kissing a boy, somehow the Saudi Wahhabi fundamentalist semi-theocracy is never counted under the heading 'threat of political Islam.'

Proponents of this concept also conveniently forget that Osama bin Laden and most of his September 11 hijackers were Saudi subjects and that their avowed purpose was to expel from Saudi Arabia the U.S. bases, established during Bush I's Gulf War against Iraq, which were seen as polluting Islam's Holy places. Another 'open secret' is the longstanding relationship between the Bush and bin Laden clans which culminated in the expatriation to Saudi Arabia of dozens of bin Laden family members residing in the U.S. in the days following the 9/11 attacks — despite the grounding of all civilian aviation and without any FBI or other interrogation as to their possible knowledge of the attacks. Blood may be thicker than water, but oil is thicker than both.

<http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L240xH247/us-imperialism-racism-ba374.jpg>

Over the years, the British-backed Moslem Brotherhood's activities spread far beyond Egypt — for example to Palestine. There in the 1970's the Israelis encouraged and financed its evangelical and social activities in newly occupied Gaza and the West bank through its 'Moslem Center' front in a 'tactical alliance' against the Palestinian resistance led by the secular PLO. These activities were directed by the Brotherhood's Palestine Apparatus as a base on which to prepare the creation in the 1980's of the Islamic political party Hamas and for its future armed struggle against both the PLO and Israel. [4] Divide-and-rule continued to bear fruit for the Israelis in the Twenty-First Century, when actual armed hostilities broke out between Fatah- and Hamas-oriented militias in the West Bank, demoralizing the Palestinians and paving the way for fresh Israeli incursions. Similarly, the 'Islamicist' tactic of attacking civilians by placing car bombs in front of mosques was first introduced by the CIA in Lebanon in the 1970's, according to award-winning journalist Allan Nairn. [5] In the 1980s we find the CIA playing the Islamic card against the Communists in the Great Game between Russia and the West over control of Afghanistan. If Osama bin Laden didn't personally work for the CIA in the 80s (as did Saddam Hussein) his fighters received U.S. arms and money through the Pakistani secret services (ISI) to combat the Russians and the Afghani Communists (who incidentally had brought secular education, female equality and relative lack of corruption to Afghanistan during their years in government).

Throughout ME/A history the imperialist West has consistently preferred to support pliant reactionary despots over

democrats and nationalists for the simple reason that it is cheaper and more profitable to pay off a small ruling group and keep the lion's share of the profits than to submit to popular demands for better wages, local development and a fairer distribution of the oil revenues. By and large, these divide-and-rule tactics have worked. And although the Clash of Civilizations paradigm presents the Islamic world as an aggressive, expansionist, religious threat to pacific Western democratic liberalism, the historical record shows that the Western governments have consistently crushed every attempt at democracy or secular nationalism in the ME/A lands. One needs only to recall the 1953 CIA-organized overthrow of the elected government of Iran and its mildly nationalistic prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, who had dared to impose partial nationalization of Iran's oil-fields (while offering to pay 25% royalties to the British). Or the 1956 French-British-Israeli invasion of Egypt, when the secular pan-Arabist government of Nasser threatened the Suez Canal.

The reason secular strongman and former CIA 'asset' Saddam Hussein suddenly got transformed from cherished ally in the war against the Ayatollahs into an Islamic 'Hitler' had nothing to do with religion. As the surviving regional power after the defeat of Iran, the Iraqi dictator got too big for his britches and tried to take a bigger cut of the profits. This would have set a very bad precedent, and it took the West two wars and an invasion to cut him down to size — naturally in the name of 'democracy' and the 'liberation' of the Iraqi people. And although the Bush II administration attempted to link Saddam Hussein with the religious fanaticism of Osama bin Ladan as a pretext for invasion, Baathist Iraq was arguably the most secular, progressive, technically advanced state in the region. One recalls that women occupied roughly half the jobs in the Iraqi civil services as well as in education and medicine. Well-trained Iraqi engineers and administrators were able to successfully repair the infrastructure after the devastations of the first Gulf War, despite the continuing U.S. embargo — something Halliburton has been unable to do after spending billions. Not surprisingly, the U.S.-British occupiers immediately pushed aside the actual democratic forces within Iraq — women, organized labor, and the educated middle class of doctors, lawyers, engineers — and based themselves exclusively on the reactionary religious and tribal elements whose civil wars reign of Islamic terror continues to this day. Another case of divide-and-rule imperialism 'creating' Islamism — and then getting caught in the 'blowback.'

http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L369xH246/Silence_on_tue_9099-93fa9.jpg

Islamic Forces on European Ground

Much of the Western hysteria over Islamism focusses on the perceived threat posed by the fifteen million Moslems presently residing in Western Europe. This hoard is seen as poised to burst out of the Wooden Gift-Horse of hardworking, peaceful immigration in order to murder and plunder the unsuspecting 'Trojans' within the European citadel. We find this Trojan Horse paradigm, minus the racist hysteria that often surrounds it, on the front page of our old friend the *N.Y. Times Weekly Book Review* which sympathetically reviewed *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam and the West* under the headline 'Strangers in the Land.' The Times' reviewer, Fouad Ajami of the conservative Hoover Institution, presents these potentially dangerous Moslem 'Strangers in the Land' as if they had been smuggled into the European heartland by liberal 'elite opinion.' He writes: 'The native populations in Western Europe hadn't voted to have the Turks and the Moroccans in Amsterdam, the Kurds in Sweden, the Arabs in London and the Pakistanis and Indians in Bradford and West Yorkshire.' The 'Strangers in the Land' are described by Ajami, himself an assimilated 1970 immigrant from Lebanon, as 'bold immigrants' [...] 'keen on imposing their will on societies given to moral relativism and tolerance' and as 'guests' who have 'overstayed their welcome.' This kind of talk puts the shoe on the wrong foot.

First off, the native populations of Pakistan, India, Iran, Iraq, Algeria, Morocco, et al didn't exactly vote to have their countries taken over by the British (or French) Empires. Nor did they vote to have their local cultures and economies destroyed and their natural resources syphoned off to Europe, leaving their homelands mired in mass poverty and unemployment. As a result of these Western incursions, members of despoiled native populations were obliged to 'vote with their feet' and seek work (and safety from post-colonial despots) in the colonial and post-colonial imperialist capitols. The 'elites' that smuggled these immigrant Trojan Horsemen into the European citadel were not trusting, bleeding-heart liberals obsessed with the plight of colonialism's economic and political refugees, but hard-headed

businessmen who needed abundant sources of cheap foreign labor to drive down the favorable wages and conditions won by well-organized, militant post-WWII native European workers. Guest-workers, refugees and illegal immigrants lacking political rights and subject to expulsion represent a perfect source of cheap labor for European (and U.S.) capital.

‘Unwelcome guests’ indeed ! Unwelcome only to competing native workers whose economic pain fueled the racist anti-immigrant right. Cheap Moslem immigrant labor was the dirty secret that fueled the Thirty Glorious Years of European capital growth. Here in France, for example, anti-Arab racism undercut class unity with the complicity of the Left (SP, CP and CGT) to the point where the formerly Communist ‘Red Belt’ of Paris suburbs ended up voting for Le Pen’s racist National Front. Speaking of Le Pen, European white racism is another subject which Western proponents of the Trojan Horse paradigm conveniently neglect while accusing its victims of refusal to ‘integrate’ themselves. Nearly a half-century since Algerian independence, France remains a *de facto* segregated Republic as far as the roughly 10% of Arabs are concerned. Naturally, they live largely among themselves and seek support in their own communities. After living for twenty-odd years in Montpellier, a southern French city with a big North African population, I can’t recall ever seeing an Arab face behind any of the ubiquitous grilled windows at the railroad station, the post office or any public administration. In contrast, colored citizens of France’s West Indian *départments* are thoroughly integrated into the civil service, and educated black Africans are more or less tolerated according to economic status. Day after day immigrants from Moslem countries and their European-born children and grandchildren face the pain and humiliation of racism, social exclusion, and discrimination — when they are not actually being persecuted or forcibly deported because of problems with documents. They should feel grateful ? Put yourself in their place: European imperialism made your ancestral homeland unlivable, so your family painfully pulled up roots and to seek work and/or freedom from persecution in Europe, where they treat you like a paria. Wouldn’t you feel ‘disaffected’ ?

Yet despite discrimination, the vast majority of the fifteen million non-white Moslems in Europe lead normal immigrant lives, struggling to stay afloat or get ahead, concerned with children and relatives back in the mother country, indifferent to politics except when it is forced down their throats. Moreover, the demographic Great Fear of an exploding Moslem immigrant population overwhelming Europe’s low-birthrate native populations turns out to have been without basis in fact. According to the respected sociologist Emmanuel Todd and his associates, overall fecundity in Moslem lands has been declining rapidly from an average of 6.8 children per woman in 1975 to 3.7 in 2005. In Algeria the birthrate is down to 2.6 and in Iran and Tunisia to 2... the same as in swinging France! [6] Moreover, despite the increased *visibility* of Islam in France (provoked by official ban on head-scarves and its inevitable defiance by Moslem girls and women), the practice of Islam in France has stagnated for the past twenty years and may actually have declined. [7] Even more surprising, mixed marriages by Franco-Algerian women grew from 6.2% in 1975 to a whopping 27.5% in 1990. [8]

Nonetheless, the Trojan Horse/population bomb myth persists, and even the Times’ moderate Lebanese immigrant Ajami reproaches these ungrateful militants as ‘second generation immigrants who owed no allegiance to the societies of Europe.’ Indignantly, the Times’ successfully integrated academic cites ‘the hostility of the new Islamism to the idea of assimilation, to the principle of nationality itself.’ Here, Adjami apparently confuses ‘integration’ with ‘assimilation’ — as does nominally anti-racist French society. He also forgets that nationality may be a portable identity for uprooted Pakistanis in Yorkshire or Algerian kids born in the dismal projects outside of Paris. In any case, unemployment among Arab youth in France is probably at least three times the already discouraging 11% figure for Franco-French. It would be hard to imagine a more fertile ground for the growth of Islamic or any other sort of militantism among disaffected nominally Moslem youth than the ghettos on the fringe of Paris and other large French cities. Yet significantly, when police brutality touched off the powder-keg and ghetto youth rioted for several days in 2005, religion had nothing to do with it, and radical Islamic militants were no where to be seen. Indeed it was Sarkozy, then Minister of the Interior (Police) in desperation introduced Islam into the discussion. Thus, after first denouncing the slum-dwellers as ‘scum’ and promising to ‘scour them with a high-pressure hose,’ Sarko summoned the Council of the Islamic Clergy of France, appointed them to speak for their community and promised them funds build Republican mosques and madrases to train ‘French’ Imams. So much for the ‘secular’ *République laïque*.

http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L388xH283/Manif_Gaza_9158-f7c44.jpg

No doubt there are plenty of fundamentalist Islamic preachers in store-front mosques around Europe (and the U.S.) trying to recruit militants and impose Shariah on their immigrant communities. They are not, however trying to impose Moslem customs on the surrounding 'societies given to moral relativism and tolerance' (Ajami's words). Where else besides Islam are angry, disaffected youth in search of identity and dignity in Europe's streets or universities to turn in the absence of secular political civil rights and labor movements defending their cause? Yet sadly in the French Republic, where racism is officially invisible and thus not on the political agenda, no Left parties — Socialist, Communist or even among the various Trotskyists — have attempted to register Arab citizens for the suffrage or bothered to solicit their votes. Only the National Front, led by Jean-Marie Le Pen's daughter Marine, attempted go for the Arab vote. In 2007 they ran Arab candidates, and the NF presidential campaign poster depicted two attractive young women, one white the other visibly North African!

Of course the clinching evidence for the Islamic Trojan Horse thesis are the terror bombings carried out with the help of Islamic kamikazes recruited from among European Moslems, the three thousand U.S. civilians killed in the 9/11/01 attacks on the Twin Towers and the victims of the London Underground bombings. Indeed, Ajami begins his article citing 200 killed and thousands wounded in Madrid in 2004 thus framing it as a 'Moor's revenge' — alluding to the expulsion of the last Moorish ruler of Granada in 1492. One problem with this truly shocking evidence for the Trojan Horse theory is that most of these horrific attacks were instigated not in Europe, but in the ME/A lands and that they were conceived as retaliation for perceived Western aggression there. Such attacks are inevitable in this asymmetrical war where one side has Predators, F-16s and cluster-bombs while the other side uses box-cutters and home-made improvised explosive devices. But the Islamic terrorist foot-soldiers who carry out such attacks, whether immigrant, European-born or foreign, are merely agents of the West's true antagonists, the radical Islamicist states and political movements in the ME/A lands. So the best that can be said for the Islamic Trojan Horse thesis is 1) that among the fifteen million nominally Moslem immigrants living more or less peacefully in various parts of Europe a few thousand disaffected youth have been won over by various competing Islamist networks and that 2) among these new militants, a few dozen have shown themselves willing to act as terrorists and martyrs for the cause. Islamic terrorists represent a very real threat to the potential victims of suicide attacks on peaceful Western commuters, but they are not likely to take over the European heartland in any foreseeable future. Scary as suicide attacks may be, the origin of this threat lies not in Europe but in the Moslem ME/A world, to which we now turn.

Radical Islamic States and Political Movements in the Mid East/Arab World

Historically, today's ME/A area corresponds geographically with the Moslem Empire of the Ottoman Turks, which lasted from 1453 to 1918 and once extended from Morocco to the gates of Vienna. Although by and large tolerant of other religions, the Ottoman Empire was nominally unified by a common faith, a mild form of Islam. In the 19th Century, a weakened Ottoman Empire, the so-called 'sick man of Europe,' fell prey to the appetites of the Western Great Powers, especially their appetite for oil, which was beginning to replace coal as Europe's principle energy source. When oil was discovered in Iran and Iraq, Germany — then the rising industrial power — drew the Ottomans into their sphere of influence. One of Britain's principle war aims in 1914-1918 was to take over the Kaiser's Ottoman oil monopoly — to the extent of diverting whole armies from the Western Front to fight the Turks (think Gallipoli). What was left of the Ottoman sphere of influence was carved up by the victors at the Versailles Peace Conference, with Britain getting the lion's share in the form of humanitarian Protectorates on which to impose unpopular neo-colonial puppet governments. For example when Britain placed a Sunni dynasty on the throne of Shiite Iraq and the local tribes revolted, Churchill ordered the British Flying Corps under 'Bomber' Harris (the future architect of the WWII Dresden raids) to bomb and machine-gun their camps and villages from the air. Churchill's rickety biplanes were less sleek than Obama's drones but quite effective against horsemen armed with sabers and muskets or women and children in tents. [9] Thus the arbitrary borders drawn on maps at Versailles in 1919 became the fault-lines of today's civil wars. Nearly a century later, the U.S. (with Britain as a junior partner) is still putting down the same insurgencies for the same oil.

Contextualizing the Threat of Radical Islam (2)

One reason radical Islamic movements have grown so powerful is that they fill the political vacuum created by the crushing of democratic social movements defending the rights of workers, women, students and national minorities. Looking at the ME/A world today, we find nothing but dreary despotisms of one kind or another — the secular, democratic, socialist option having been ruled out by Western intervention and Western support for local Islamic reactionaries. 'Its not that the Taliban is very strong,' an Afghan politician was recently quoted as saying, 'but that the government is very weak.' [10] This observation could be expanded to comprise many of the corrupt, despotic, ineffectual Western-backed regimes in the ME/A world.

When occasional show elections are organized, Islamic parties rush in to fill the political vacuum. For example, it is generally accepted that the reason Hamas pulled off a surprise victory in the Palestinian elections of 2006 was that Arafat's ruling Fatah, having agreed at Oslo to become Israel's *gendarme* in return for a shred of legitimacy, had become dictatorial, corrupt and ineffectual in dealing with the Israelis. The voters were so disgusted they went for the image of a pure, uncorrupted, socially-concerned Islamic party willing to stand up to the occupiers. The same analysis seems to apply to the Algerian elections of 1990 when the Islamist FIS outpolled the historical party of Algerian independence, the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN). In both cases the results of Western-style electoral democracy were annulled with the support of the Western democracies themselves. As soon as the Palestinian election results were known, Israel and the U.S. refused to recognize the Hamas victory, while in Algeria the French backed a military coup by the Army/FLN. Both situations led to prolonged and bloody civil wars between the Islamists and the illegitimate Western-backed secular dictatorships during which civilians bore most of the brunt of violence.

The history of modern Iran reveals a more complex, but essentially similar pattern, where the Islamist party eventually did take and hold power. In 1953 after the CIA overthrew Iranian democracy, the U.S. restored the monarchy and installed Reza Shah Pahlavi on the Peacock Throne. (One recalls that the Shah's father had been removed by his British patrons in 1941 for collaboration with the Nazis). The new Shah, although a sadistic dictator and megalomaniac was a pro-U.S., secular modernizer, and after a quarter of a century of torture-based economic development, the royal peacock was swept away on a tide of demonstrations by revolutionary students, women and men, non-commissioned officers, oil-workers and technicians who had grown up under his progressive, yet oppressive regime. For a while Marxists, feminists, and revolutionary workers councils flourished along with middle-class professionals and democratic exiles, provoking fears of new Mossedeghs and expropriated oil-fields.

So how did the stern, fanatical, bearded reactionary Ayatollahs take over? To begin with, Rockefeller *protégé* President Jimmy Carter deliberately alienated the Iranian people by offering U.S. asylum to the dying, deposed Shah rather than reaching out to these newly liberated democratic and nationalist forces. [11] Moreover, the democratic forces, having grown up under the eye of the Shah's dreaded secret police, *Savak*, had no pre-existing structured organizations — aside from the opportunistic Tudah Communist Party which called for a popular front with Khomeini's 'progressive' Islamists! The Ayatollahs, on the other hand, were superbly organized. They already had their religious networks in the villages and among the *bazaaris*. Following a general plan outlined years earlier by the Moslem Brotherhood, the Islamists rapidly infiltrated all the workers' and neighborhood committees as well as the revolutionary militias. At first they talked tolerance and preached a populist social gospel, but later they attacked and marginalized their secular adversaries. Meanwhile, the Ayatollahs made a deal with *Savak*, which had remained dormant behind the scenes following the collapse of the monarchy. When the moment arrived, the Ayatollahs tightened the noose, and suddenly the leftists and democrats found themselves once again in Iran's torture-prisons.

<http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L240xH240/iraq-women-hung-1-7f014.jpg>

So far, the case of Iran seemed to follow the established pattern of authoritarian right as spoiler, foiling the social and political aspirations of democratic Left during crises of the established order to the ultimate benefit of Western oil interests. But once the Ayatollahs took power, there was no stopping them. Their Islamic Republic incarnated the national aspirations of a historically rich, powerful nation which had long been manipulated, repressed and humiliated by Western imperialism. Once again, Iran would rise to its ancient status as major West Asian power, like the Persian

Contextualizing the Threat of Radical Islam (2)

empire which dominated the region for centuries B.C.E. Although repressive, the Islamic Republic was at first popular. From a Western point of view, however, it became clear that if the Iranian revolutionaries were allowed to succeed in defying the United States, their example of radical independence would spread. The seething masses among the other corrupt, unpopular, pro-Western Moslem despotisms in the region would rise and the U.S.-armed dictatorships would fall like so many dominos, depriving the West of *'its'* oil.

Once again, divide-and-rule tactics came to the rescue of the imperialists when neighboring Iraq (instigated, financed and armed by the U.S.) initiated a bloody eight-year war against Iran during which huge battles on the scale of World Wars I and II were fought. While millions were killed, mutilated, or lost their homes, the U.S. profited both politically and financially through arms and equipment sales (remember the famous photograph of Saddam Hussein shaking hands over a deal with Halliburton CEO Dick Cheney?) Both countries were bled white, but in the end Saddam ended up with a surfeit of modern U.S. arms which tempted him to take a bite out of plump, oil-rich Kuwait next door. Indeed, with Persia out of the way, why shouldn't Mesopotamia be the regional bully? Believing he had the green light from the State Department in 1991, [12] Saddam made his incursion into Kuwait. Suddenly the CIA's fair-haired boy became the new 'Hitler,' and the U.S. organized a military coalition to put the mustachioed upstart in his place. However, unlike his idiot son, Bush the First was smart enough leave Saddam's Sunni-based regime in power as a foil against Shiite Iran. Indeed, he even allowed him to use his elite Republican Guard to crush the restive Shiites and Kurds, who had risen up in response to the Coalition's promises of liberation. Thus for ninety years, from 1919 to 1999, Anglo-American interests successfully dominated the oil-rich ME/A world, suppressing, subverting or containing democratic and nationalist revolutions while relying on reactionary despots to rule — so long as they remained pliable clients.

[1] Rashid Khalidi writing in the *London Review of Books*, 29 January 2009, p. 5.

[2] I am not asserting here that all, or even a majority of Pashtuns support the Taliban. But when U.S. drones bomb Pashtun civilian villages or compounds on 'intelligence' provided by locals (who might be personal enemies) that 'Taliban' (including relatives and fellow tribesmen) might be present there, the Pashtuns can only see this as a war against them as a nation.

[3] Cf. Said K. Aburish, *A Brutal Friendship: The West and the Arab Elite*, 1997 and Caroline Fourest, *Frère Tariq*, Paris, 2005. Not by coincidence did the first Arabic translation of 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,' still in circulation today, appear in the 1920s. This anti-Semitic forgery was created by the Imperial Russian secret services around 1905 in order to designate a scapegoat and divert the growing Russian revolutionary movement into reactionary channels (*pogroms*, Black Hundreds). Today, as in the Twenties, it serves to divert the anger of the Moslem masses away from their despotic governments toward Zionism and the Jew-dominated West.

[4] Cf. Adam Shatz, "Michal's Luck," *London Review of Books*, May 14, 2009, p. 5.

[5] http://www.democracynow.org/2010/1/6/obama_has_kept_the_machine_set

[6] Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd, *Le rendez-vous des civilisations* (Paris, 2007).

[7] "Décryptage: l'islam en France et en chiffres 1989-2009", <http://religion.info>

[8] Emmanuel Todd, *Le destin des immigrés* (Paris, 1997) quoted in the Jan. 2010 *Le Monde diplomatique*, p. 7.

[9] Eventually the pilots, who had volunteered to fight Germans airmen, not Arab tribesmen on the ground, became sickened by the sight of the slaughter, revolted, and demanded to be discharged back to Britain. Nonetheless, Churchill's 1919-1921 British Iraqi campaign deserves historical recognition as the first use of deliberate terror bombing of civilians, an innovation unjustly attributed to the 1936 bombing of Guernica by Herman Goering's *Luftwaffe*

Contextualizing the Threat of Radical Islam (2)

[10] Patrick Cobern, 'Return to Afghanistan,' *London Review of Books*, 11 June, 2009, p. 14.

[11] See Richard Greeman, "Obama: the New Carter of the *Pax Americana*?" *Divergences*, December 2009.

<http://divergences.be/spip.php?article1657>

[12] Whether through ineptitude or by design, on the eve of Saddam's incursion into Kuwait, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq was reported to have reassured him that it was "not U.S. policy" to intervene in inter-Arab conflicts.