America in Islam

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FOR all practical purposes, the question of Islam in America is little more than a generation old. Yet it is already extraordinarily complicated and burdensome, both for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, with no signs of becoming any less so. This is true for a number of reasons, the most important of which is that there are not one but two questions: that of Islam in America and America in Islam. The latter question had been growing in importance within the general Muslim world over the last two to three decades. It became the defining issue, however, with the September 11 terrorist attacks, undertaken as they were as an act of war against America in the name of Islam. American Muslims, then, are forced to answer this question not only as U.S. citizens seeking to define their place in that society, but also as members of a worldwide Muslim community for whom this debate is charged and divisive.

The fact that most American Muslims are recent immi-

grants means they bring this contentious debate with them from their countries of origin. My Muslim friends and acquaintances often say this is a burden they would prefer to be without, seeking in America, as they do, like many immigrants before them, a more secure and comfortable life rather than a religious mission or conflict. Instead, their religious concerns—if they have any, for many American Muslims have weak ties to their religious rituals and institutions—are more immediate: Is there a mosque in the vicinity, and is it one to which they should attach themselves? Where can one buy *halal* meat, meat that fulfills the requirements of the Muslim dietary code? Above all, most American Muslims do not share the terrorists' view of the United States and do not wish to be implicated in their violence.

At the same time, international developments—the Afghan jihad of the 1980s, Islamic terrorism of the 1990s, the end of the Cold War, and the enormous growth of American power—have sharpened the question of America within Islam. The September 11 attacks, as well as the Bush administration's political and military response to them, merely catalyzed this debate. The growing influence of the United States within the wider Muslim world has become increasingly impossible to ignore, not least because the political, ideological, and violent activity of Islamic radicals have succeeded in making it *the* thematic issue. Radical or Jihadi Islam has enjoyed remarkable success over the past 30 years because it responds to the malaise of the Muslim world and the question of the day with a clear, appealing answer: America, with its overwhelming power and modern, liberal democratic ideals, is the scourge of Islam and the antithesis of a true Muslim life.

These groups, of course, have not flourished unopposed in recent decades—autocratic or tyrannical rulers in Muslim countries have often suppressed them in order to preserve their rule. As an ideological movement, however, radical Islam has been nearly unrivaled. It has therefore become increasingly better organized and funded throughout the Muslim world, allowing it to define the framework for intra-Muslim discussion, including among the

vast majority of Muslims who reject its views. These dissenters have found themselves compelled to respond to the radicals' analysis and critique of the state of contemporary Islam, as well as its prescriptions for the future of the faith. By and large, the response has mostly been defensive, passive, and unorganized.

This is also the general state of ideological affairs for minority Muslim communities around the world, including in the United States. In fact, the American Muslim community, like other minority Muslim communities, is at greater risk of having the radicals define the framework of their discussion and reflection. This is because hundreds of millions of Muslims the world over still live the traditional Islamic way of life that the radicals oppose as corrupt and not sufficiently unified. Their faith stems from centuries-old traditions and institutions that are rooted in their particular, remarkably diverse communities. In minority communities, however, the radicals find Muslims who have been uprooted from their natural, traditional way of life. As is the case in America, these Muslims are required to establish a "new tradition" in a more or less self-conscious way if they wish to remain Muslims. Their minority status within their adopted countries often leads the majority society to look upon them as a unitary community, no matter how different some segments may be from others. For these and other reasons, these Muslims are tempted by a single definition of Islam, and the radicals are more than happy to offer their vision of a unified global *ummah* struggling to reassert itself.

Advancing this agenda is made easier by the relative freedom these radicals have to dispense their illiberal, antidemocratic message within Western liberal democracies—freedom that the repressive governments of most Muslim countries often deny them. These efforts have been augmented by substantial funding from countries like Saudi Arabia to publish radical texts and support teachers, imams, and institutions espousing radical ideas. This funding is not the same as what was allegedly raised for terrorist activities. Rather, it is funds, publicly acknowledged by the Saudi and other governments and semi-public charities

they underwrite, for the direct support of ostensibly educational and religious institutions, sometimes described as "development assistance."

The American Muslim community is subject to all of these developments and forces. Of course, it bears the distinction of being the only Muslim community actually dwelling in the belly of "the Great Satan," making the question of Islam in America truly existential in nature. At the same time, the immediate question of America in Islam is equally existential for a U.S. government embarked on nation-building and democracy promotion in Iraq and Afghanistan as a means of suppressing Islamic radicalism. If either hope to develop thoughtful and potent responses to the questions facing them—questions for which the radicals have already established the grounds for debate—the necessary point of departure is an understanding of Islam's historical experience of modernity.

Islam and the modern world

The struggle between radical Islam and its actual or potential moderate alternatives is most often cast as a struggle over two ideas: The first is jihad; the second is modernity, especially liberal democracy and capitalism. The idea of modernity poses one fundamental question: Does Islam require, permit, or forbid the organization of political life on democratic principles? If the answer is yes, then the debate will resemble those of other cultures that sought to reconcile their particular ways of life with liberal democratic principles. But if the answer is no, then the idea of jihad poses even more urgent questions about the possibility of a broader conflict among civilizations.

Seeking to offer the Muslim world answers to these fundamental questions, many non-Muslims have suggested Islam needs to experience a "Reformation" akin to that which Europe underwent in its early modern period. Modern Western individualism and democratic culture, some argue, was the outcome of the Protestant Reformation, and the Muslim world must travel along a similar trajectory. Whether or not this is a correct reading of Western history, it is a profound misunderstanding of the current

Islamic situation. Moreover, it completely neglects the actual events of the early Reformation: a struggle that was, by the carnage it wrought in Europe, a disaster unequaled until the twentieth century.

The fact of the matter is that Islam is already experiencing a reformation—a reformation involving a deep and bitter struggle over the character of religious doctrine and practice, as well as its relationship to political authority. There are, however, considerable differences between the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestant Reformation and the current struggle within Islam. These derive partly from the differences between the religions and from differences in historical circumstances. The latter are presently more important for understanding the animus of the radicals.

The European wars that the Reformation sparked occurred primarily at the outset of the modern era. Certain features of modern politics, such as the separation of church and state, arose as solutions to Europe's religious wars. More importantly, however, Europe's renewed power and vigor vis-à-vis its only important political rival, Islam, was ironically coincidental with those wars. By contrast, the war within Islam presupposes the existence of modernity, which is the obsession of those radicals spearheading the reformation. Indeed, in its resemblance to twentieth-century totalitarianism, radical Islam is closer to modernity than it is to traditional Islam. Furthermore, Islam's present reformation coincides with, and is largely a reaction to, the tremendous decline in Muslim power over the last 300 years. This would be difficult to bear under any circumstances, but it has been especially so insofar as Islam interpreted worldly glory as evidence of its religious truthfulness—that is, its superiority to and replacement of other monotheistic faiths, especially Christianity.

It is hard to overstate the collective psychological effect of the decline of Islamic power, coincidental with the rise of Christian power and its modern political organization. Having acquired dominion over large parts of the world—even capturing Constantinople, Christendom's most ancient political capital—Islam suffered a monumental reversal. The British replaced Muslims as rulers of India

and Egypt. The Russians conquered Central Asia. The Dutch took control of Indonesia. The French occupied much of North Africa. Large parts of the Balkans and Central Europe freed themselves from their Muslim masters. In a final insulting blow, the Islamic world went from being an imperial force to a colonized land with the Ottoman defeat in World War I.

This was humiliating from every perspective, and the central question pervading the Islamic world from the end of World War I (at the latest) was how to address and regain this lost honor. This Muslim concern with honor is crucial to understanding Islam's experience of modernity. Past glories are constantly remembered, cherished, and mourned in sermons throughout the Muslim world. Even the loss of Spain over 500 years ago was evoked with bitterness by Ayman Zawahiri, the deputy head of Al-Qaeda, in his own post-9/11 statement. At the same time, however, it is difficult for Americans and Westerners generally to appreciate this obsession with honor, since it plays such a minor role in liberal democratic discourse.

It is by responding to this collective longing for honor that the radicals initiated the current Islamic reformation. Radical Islam declared its opposition to modernity from the very beginning, usefully defined as the year 1928, when an Egyptian named Hassan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood. To be accurate, this strand of radical Islam was preceded in the "modern" era by other forms, such as Wahhabism, founded in the eighteenth-century in Arabia. Over time, however, these various strands of Islamic radicalism have tended to converge, generally seeking to recreate Islam's glorious past while simultaneously rejecting the secular nationalist political order that gradually emerged after World War I.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, nationalism in the Arab Muslim world, under the leadership of Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, was poised to topple and transform "traditional," usually monarchic, Arab Muslim regimes like Saudi Arabia. The chief internal source of opposition to this attempted modernization was the apparently retrograde and reactionary Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Nasser responded

brutally to forestall this challenge—imprisoning, torturing, and ultimately executing many members of the group, including Sayyed al-Qutb, radical Islam's most distinguished intellectual leader and author. Many of the Brotherhood's members fled to Saudi Arabia where they found sanctuary and solidarity with the native Wahhabists. Among them was Qutb's brother, who became a teacher in Saudi Arabia (Osama Bin Laden was one of his students). Thus when nationalism collapsed through a series of disastrous wars, in particular the Yemeni Civil War and then the Six Day War, the chief ideological beneficiary was radical Islam.

Throughout the 1980s, Muslim radicals appeared to solidify their advantage: Iranian revolutionaries humiliated the United States by overthrowing their pro-American government and replacing it with a theocracy, while jihadists bled the Soviet Union and ultimately forced its disgraceful retreat from Afghanistan. This triumph, however, was short-lived: Radicals were unable to come to power in Algeria and Egypt, and where they did succeed, in the Sudan and Afghanistan, their Islamic regimes are now gone. The Islamic Republic of Iran is in very great decline and may be in a terminal phase. Nonetheless, despite its setbacks, the radical movement still possesses the greatest ideological vitality in the Muslim world. In fact, it is nearly without organized competitors.

Modern problems

From the perspective of contemporary political sociology or the historical experience of the last 50 years, one might argue that the solution to Islam's internal crisis is the adoption of liberal democratic principles and modern political institutions. According to this line of argument, made most famously by Francis Fukuyama, the collapse of communism eliminated all doubts about the sources of modern power, progress, and prosperity. The victory of the United States and its liberal democratic allies demonstrated that the logic of the past 200 years of modern revolutions, beginning in 1776, was the theoretical and practical superiority of liberal democracy and capitalism. The source of contemporary Muslim weakness, it has been

argued, is the so-called "democratic deficit." Fixing that will once again enable Muslims to hold their heads high.

This is almost certainly the only solution in material terms. But two main obstacles make such a political transformation difficult and thus strengthen the radicals' hand. First, the decline of Muslim power and prestige has coincided with the impact of modernity. More significantly, the Muslim world has made several attempts, especially in the early twentieth century, to reverse its decline by adopting the apparent ideas and political institutions of its Western conquerors. This embrace of modernity is associated with nationalism and secularism, and it failed miserably.

It did lead, and relatively quickly, to the reestablishment of Muslim political independence in a variety of new states. Those states, however, quickly became autocratic and modern insofar as they acquired the technology to control and repress their citizens. This brought with it other modern curses—rapid urbanization, for example—with few if any modern blessings. Indeed, modernization weakened traditional Muslim society and those institutions that provided some checks, however informal, against arbitrary rule. Unless they were members of the small governing elite, individual citizens were blocked from any political participation, suffered from state-sanctioned brutality, and experienced profoundly diminished educational and economic opportunities.

As a result, these countries became steadily weaker and poorer, not stronger or more powerful. Muslims enjoyed no individual or collective increase in power and honor. This experience of "modernity" was so unhappy that it disabused many Muslims of a belief in its potential for success and made modern ideas like secularism anathema. Though it is possible to argue that the error of the Muslim world was in adopting the wrong models of modernity, this qualification has thus far had little impact.

Here one encounters the second difficulty: The experience of modernity has been so unsuccessful that Muslims have been tempted by the radicals to understand it as the means by which the West, understood not only as modern but as essentially Christian, has managed to continue its

rule over the Islamic world. Even if modern political and economic principles could reverse the Islamic world's material fortunes, many Muslims believe they would lose their souls in the process, sacrificing eternal rewards for more ephemeral and temporal ones. However open to modern prescriptions they might have been in the past, Muslims find it difficult to entertain them now.

Reflecting on this long, tragic experience of modern life has produced a general prejudice by which a majority of Muslims understand their present situation. This prejudice holds that Muslims bear no responsibility for the weakness of the Muslim world: It is the fault of Western influences, Christian crusades, or Zionist conspiracies. This is less an idea than an emotion, best described by Fouad Ajami as "belligerent self-pity." A remarkable expression of it is the belief that the September 11 attacks were not the work of Muslims but rather the United States, Israel, or both as a pretext for attacking Islam. The pathological character of this and other delusions like it is only underscored by what was considered to be self-evident proof of its truth—the incompetence of Muslims to carry out such an attack.

This interpretation of the Islamic world's fate is qualified by only one notion of Muslim responsibility—the failure of Muslims to adhere strictly to their faith. The only remedy, then, is for Muslims to rededicate themselves to a fundamentalist reading of Islam, including the duty to fight spiritual corruption by all means available. Only this can restore the Muslim world materially and vindicate the honor of Islam.

This radical belief, repeated endlessly in books and other publications throughout the Muslim world, has largely set in motion the aforementioned reformation of Islam. Along with violence and intimidation, it has drowned out other views. Perhaps most seriously, it has discouraged Muslims from the serious self-examination that is required for any fruitful consideration of the future. The willingness to entertain self-criticism is today the core element of any serious notion of Muslim "moderation." This begs one crucial question: If a moderate, self-critical Islam seems unlikely to emerge *inside* Muslim countries, could it emerge

outside and exert some influence on Muslim countries? This could make both the fate of Islam in America and the role of America in Islam more important than ever.

A sociology of Muslim America

In the mid 1970s, my late teacher and friend, Professor Fazlur Rahman of the University of Chicago, invited me to a reception and dinner in Chicago for the Pakistani Ambassador to the United States. Observing the several hundred people in attendance, I remarked to him that it was an impressively large gathering. He responded that it comprised practically all Pakistanis in Chicago and practically all Chicago Muslims, period. Today the Muslim community of Chicago numbers between 100,000 and 200,000.

The extraordinary newness of America's Muslim community is often unappreciated. Thirty years ago there were almost no Muslims, the one exception being African-American Muslims. Even that community, however, possessed few orthodox African-American Muslims, as opposed to members of the Nation of Islam. The United States had received a sizeable number of Arab immigrants since the 1920s, and many Americans tended to assume they were Muslim. But this earlier community was mainly comprised of Christian Arabs. Today, there are probably between two and three million American Muslims, although more dubious studies make estimates as high as six to eight million.

American Muslims come from an extraordinary variety of Muslim countries, comprise an enormous variety of ethnicities, and speak a variety of mother tongues. This makes them absolutely unique among Muslim communities around the world. Although estimates vary, the proportional distribution is roughly as follows: The largest group is from South Asia. Making up 35 to 40 percent of the American Muslim population, it is also the fastest growing group by virtue of immigration. The second largest group (30 percent) consists of African-American Muslims; the third largest group (25 percent) is Arab Muslim; and the remaining 5 to 10 percent comes from Africa, Turkey, Central Asia, and Europe. As a result, American Muslims often have little more than faith in common, and

sometimes not even that can be said unambiguously—for the American Muslim community includes both Sunni and Shii Muslims, the latter of which comprise roughly 15 to 20 percent of the total American Muslim population.

American Muslims differ from other countries' minority Muslim communities in two other important ways: They are a widely-dispersed group and have relatively high economic and educational standing. At least 12 states—New York, California, Texas, Michigan, Illinois, Florida, New Jersey, Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Maryland—have more than 100,000 Muslims, and the first six each have more than 200,000. Nonetheless, American Muslims are concentrated around a few large cities: New York, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Detroit, and Chicago. With the exception of African-American Muslims, America's Muslim households are relatively prosperous: More than half have incomes in excess of $50,000 a year, and the average overall is about $55,000. This undoubtedly reflects the fact that nearly half of all Muslim Americans earn their living in professions such as engineering, medicine, teaching, and business management. It also reflects the fact that Muslim Americans well exceed national educational averages, with nearly 60 percent holding college degrees.

Organizationally speaking, America's Muslim community is still in its infancy. Most well-known American Muslim organizations—the American Muslim Council, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the Muslim Public Affairs Council, for example—were only founded in the 1990s. Since these organizations are not membership organizations in the manner of other denominational institutions, and because of the extraordinary diversity, relative prosperity, and dispersion of America's Muslims, one can hardly speak of any organized Muslim community.

In addition, major Muslim organizations also suffer the strain of intra-Muslim ethnic and racial tensions. For example, at a number of meetings I have attended over the past few years, African-American and South Asian Muslims have complained that many major Muslim organizations were too preoccupied with an "Arab Muslim agenda"—meaning the Arab-Israeli dispute—to the detri-

ment of their own concerns. Similar disputes exist between traditional, if not simply moderate, Muslims and the radicals. The latter have held up a so-called “Arab Islam”—the Islam of Arabia that is more or less embodied in Wahhabism—as the only true Islam.

Therefore, many of these established “general” Muslim organizations are—unfortunately but perhaps unsurprisingly—compromised to varying degrees by radical sympathies. Radical Muslims have sought to proselytize their “Arab Islam” in non-Arab Muslim countries. The best known example is the thousands of *medresehs,* or elementary religious schools, established in Pakistan throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Some American Muslim organizations are endowed with the same spirit. Others even possess direct connections to terrorist groups through various individual leaders. Because these organizations have few rivals, their claims to represent Muslims have often been credited by the media and the government. But this has increasingly come into question as their claim to moderation has also been doubted. Fortunately, there are some exceptions—notably the Islamic Supreme Council of America and the American Islamic Congress.

With all of these competing dynamics, it remains an open question what Islam in America will ultimately become. It could continue to be diverse and decentralized—peacefully reflecting ethnic and sectarian differences, even producing a variety of new forms, as other religions in America have done. There could also arise a unitary form of American Islam. This would not necessarily be bad, but it depends on how this unitary Islam would be oriented. One development, however, is clear: Following the September 11 attacks, the nature of Islam in America has become increasingly defined by the global role of America in Islam. This is to say that American Muslims are now, more than ever, forced to engage in the worldwide struggle over the current reformation within their religion.

American Muslims after September 11

As should be obvious, American Muslims face greater burdens after September 11, 2001 than they did before that day. These burdens obviously include the heightened

awareness and scrutiny of their community. President Bush has done a great deal to make the government's necessary precautions and actions as bearable as possible for America's Muslim community. He has stated, from the very beginning, that the United States is not at war with Islam itself but with a small group within Islam. And by and large, the country has responded with overwhelming benevolence. This certainly contrasts positively with earlier parts of American history, when Catholic immigrants were actively persecuted and physically assaulted. In fact, many American Muslims, even well-educated ones, to whom I have mentioned this have been genuinely astounded to learn of the early experience of Catholics in America. Perhaps an even more relevant comparison is with that of the Japanese-American community during World War II.

Nonetheless, it is hard to deny that heightened scrutiny has become an important public issue for American Muslims. "Official" Muslim spokesmen have made charges of discrimination and persecution: profiling, hate crimes, and other anti-Muslim actions. They have condemned government closures of Muslim charities suspected of funding terrorist activities and the arrest of some American Muslims charged with terrorist connections. They have been especially critical of Attorney General John Ashcroft, the Department of Justice, and the Patriot Act.

Criticisms of U.S. foreign policy now join these domestic complaints. The merger of the two has produced the charge that America is at war with Islam. The question according to this perspective is not whether Islam can accept America but rather whether America accepts Islam. As one would expect, these complaints are accompanied by expressions of fear, anger, and resentment. More generally, it expresses the notion that Muslims have a very deep grievance with America whether at home or abroad.

It is hard to know how widely shared these views and feelings are among American Muslims. Several Muslim friends and acquaintances have told me that they have ceased attending certain mosques, and in some cases mosque altogether, owing to the likelihood that they will hear these

opinions expressed. They are nonetheless reluctant to air their disagreement publicly since they are liable to be charged with disloyalty or "collaboration." Indeed, the problem of intra-Muslim intimidation was an important theme at a conference sponsored by my project on "Islam and American Democracy," whose object is to support serious Muslim work on an alternative to radical Islam. Though the Muslim participants disagreed on many issues, they were nearly unanimous in complaining of threatened intimidation from other American Muslims and especially Muslim organizations.

One pertinent example was the case in Orlando, Florida, in which the state declined to issue a driver's license to a Muslim woman who had refused to be photographed without a veil. Several Muslim organizations chose to make this case a *cause célèbre* of anti-Muslim discrimination, and the woman was represented by lawyers from the American Civil Liberties Union. A distinguished Muslim-American theologian and law professor, Yale's Khaled Abou-el Fadl, agreed to appear as a witness for the state in accord with his view that her religious rights had not been violated. As a result, he was publicly denounced as an infidel.

Even if a majority of American Muslims feel aggrieved, it is hard to know whether that derives more from their American experience or from concerns imported from the wider Muslim world. As a heavily immigrant community, America's Muslims are in contact with families and friends abroad. This has always been true of American immigrant communities, but it is perhaps especially true today. Cheap, instantaneous methods of communication, as well as America's heightened political and military involvement in the Muslim world over the last two years, have made foreign impressions of the United States easy to imbibe for American Muslims. The most troubling instance of this was how quickly the rumor that America and Israel were behind the September 11 attacks circulated among, and was believed by, many American Muslims. This suggests that to the extent American Muslims do feel aggrieved it may be as much, if not more, a foreign import as a domestic product.

Though it is difficult to separate these foreign griev-

ances from domestic concerns, it is possible, perhaps likely, that issues of foreign policy will play the larger role in shaping the dispositions of American Muslims. Unless catastrophic terrorist attacks on U.S. soil become more frequent, it is unlikely that the domestic situation of American Muslims will deteriorate. On the other hand, the present administration has chosen—and, in all likelihood, any future administration will choose—to seek to prevent such attacks by "taking the war to the enemy" abroad. This inevitably means that the United States will continue to be in conflict with foreign Muslim radicals, and those enemies will inevitably try to rally their co-religionists with the charge that America is at war with Islam. Try as it may to repudiate this charge, the U.S. government will likely have difficulty rebutting it, even through its most benign gestures.

A new concordat?

A civil war is raging within the soul of Islam pitting radicals, along with their terrorist offspring, against moderate Muslims who wish to embrace modern democratic, social, and economic principles. The subjects of this dispute are encapsulated by America. In effect, then, America has become a party to that religious war. If this was largely unavoidable—if only as a means of protecting ourselves from great, even potentially devastating, terror—then it also presents various complications. American intervention in this kind of conflict is new, even if some analogues may be found in the prior struggles against fascism and communism. More particularly, as an officially secular regime, the majority of whose citizens are Christian, the United States cannot avoid an ambiguous position in what is an intra-Muslim theological dispute.

Given these unhappy circumstances, what are the prospects for alternative lines of thought and action that could redress the Islamic world's malaise and prevent an enduring conflict between Islam and America? These are questions that confront all Muslims and now all Americans, but perhaps especially American Muslims. For according to the radicals, American Muslims must choose between

being Americans or Muslims. They cannot in principle be both. If they must reside in America, it can only be to the end of bringing America into the Islamic fold—into the Dar al-Islam, the House of Islam, rather than Dar al-Harb, the House of War.

The pervasive radical interpretation of Islam poses a direct threat to the development of moderate alternatives—for it does not simply attack certain democratic principles but rejects as corrupt the entire democratic way of life, especially in the areas of family and sexuality. A more general difficulty is overcoming the fact that contemporary Muslim thought lacks extensive articulation of important democratic ideas like freedom, liberty, and even citizenship. In addition, similar conflicts of interpretation exist over reconciling divine rule and popular sovereignty: For all radicals and many traditional Muslims believe the only legitimate authority is divine law, *sharia*, understood as intrinsically incompatible with human freedom. It is true that the West struggled with a comparable set of problems for nearly half a millennium, but it will not be a happy circumstance for the United States if this process requires a similar duration.

Though these questions concern the most important political and theological ideas, it is possible they could be answered in a positive way by the American Muslim experience itself, at least for American Muslims but perhaps also for their co-religionists worldwide. Indeed, America has worked a similar brand of magic before: the magic that has enabled it to receive diverse peoples with equally diverse traditions—many lacking clear democratic foundations, others outright hostile to democracy—and then nurture within them an attachment to democracy. Substantial aspects of these non-American and even premodern traditions were reinterpreted in the light of democratic experience and in a manner favorable to it. This effect was particularly pronounced in the case of religion since America never viewed democracy and religion as mutually exclusive, as was often the case in the European historical context.

There are reasons to be moderately optimistic that Is-

lam in America will develop a principled attachment to democracy similar to other religious traditions. A vast majority of American Muslims do not support terrorism and are eager to find their place in American life. In fact, they are already much better integrated into American society than many of their co-religionists in Europe, who are predominantly poor and geographically segregated into ghettoes. Furthermore, as the American Muslim scholar Khaled Abou-el Fadl has observed, Muslims have familiarized themselves over the past 50 years with democratic procedures—elections, legislatures, and the like. What they still lack, in his view, is experience of a democratic ethos, the habits of mind and heart that enable democratic life to succeed. For the cultivation of such an ethos there is no better place than the United States.

As always, however, there is the question of leadership, and here the situation is much more troubling. Does the American Muslim community contain within its midst or will it produce serious, thoughtful, and above all, courageous leaders capable of articulating a new and religiously persuasive vision for American Islam? Furthermore, will such leaders receive the attention and support of their co-religionists?

The answer to the first question is promising. One can point to a number of scholars and intellectuals who have important and helpful things to say. Abdul Aziz Sachedina of the University of Virginia, Ahmed al-Rahim of Harvard, Zeinab al-Suweij of the American Islamic Congress, Sheikh Muhammed Kabbani of the Islamic Supreme Council of America, Sohail Hashmi of Mount Holyoke, Asma Asfarrudin of Notre Dame, Qamar al Huda of Boston College, Hussein Haqqani of the Carnegie Endowment, Abdul Wahab al Kebsi of the National Endowment for Democracy, and the aforementioned Khaled Abou el Fadl. But whether these thinkers will gain a wide public hearing and the backing of their fellow Muslims is far from clear. Due to intimidation and the greater public standing of the "official" Muslim organizations, which are unsympathetic to the reformers' efforts, their voices have had to struggle to be heard and lack public validation. Since the Muslim

American community takes its cues at least partially from the opinions of non-Muslim American society, this is a major problem.

In this sense at least, America has a salutary role to play in encouraging voices of moderation within Islam. Whether it will do so is another matter. American engagement must include two elements: On the one hand, non-Muslims must resist indulging the litany of anti-Western complaints that have their origin in radical Islam. On the other hand, they must provide public access and credit to those American Muslim leaders who clearly oppose radical Islam and energetically offer alternatives. These have been the guiding principles of the project I direct as well as those of others. The short term results, though limited, have been positive.

Unfortunately, many other such ventures have acquiesced to Islamic immoderation. This has in part been the result of American ideological impulses, of both Right and Left, rather than Muslim ones. On the American Left, one has the impact of multiculturalism and victimology; on the Right, one has short-sighted efforts to find Muslim allies in the culture wars over abortion and family issues. One recent expression of the former, and perhaps also the latter, is the appointment of the Swiss Muslim intellectual Tariq Ramadan (grandson of Hassan al Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood), who has an undeserved reputation as Europe's leading Muslim moderate, as the Henry Luce Professor of the Joan Kroc Institute at Notre Dame University. The impact of non-Muslim indulgence of radical Islam is unhealthy.

But if American Islam were to offer a moderate alternative, could it have consequences beyond itself? Just as the global civil war within Islam has effects on Islam in America, the political progress of American Muslims could have repercussions for the wider theological conflict. This, too, is not without precedent. Some argue that America's assimilatory powers have not only transformed nearly all of its immigrants into citizens but have also had an impact beyond its shores. Such, it has been argued, was the effect of America on Catholicism. According to this view,

the American Catholic experience not only created American Catholic democrats but eventually led the Church itself to reconsider its earlier, critical views of liberalism and democracy. This American-led process of reconsideration culminated in the Vatican II encyclical, *Dignitatis Humanae*, that affirmed the principle of religious freedom and therewith, in principle, liberal democracy.

It is not out of the question that the American Muslim experience, at least in the long run, could be similarly transformative. This might, however, be too much to hope for and too much to ask of America's Muslims. They have enough radical elements to overcome and theologico-political compromises to formulate at home. And they have their own lives to lead. The United States should not expect that its Muslim communities will lead a global religious revolution by example. Nor should the nation wager its security on the emergence of such a panacea.

The future of Islam in America will be bright if the country's Muslim communities gradually adapt their religious traditions to the country's liberal-democratic principles—becoming, in their own particular way, ever more thoughtful participants in the national experiment. On the other hand, America's ability to affect for the better the outcome of Islam's global civil war is unknown. Only this much is certain: America must, when it is absolutely necessary, defend the forces of moderation and freedom.