

## THE RISING TIDE OF ISLAM (\*)

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### I

In November 1970 heavily armed religious radical fanatics break into Islam's holiest shrine at Mecca; A mob, fired equally by religious devotion and hatred of the West still holds American diplomats hostage in the US Embassy at Tehran; In Islamabad a crowd of young muslims sacked the US embassy; In Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood, continues to step up its campaign of violent terror; in Kuwait two Shiis were arrested in November 1979 on a charge of conspiring to lead a Khomeinystyle Islamic Revoution; from Libya, Islamic Missionary activity is being carride out by a special government department; Even in Turkey, unique secular state of Muslim world, a religious fanatic threatned to assassinate the Pope during his official visit to Turkey. More items could be added to the list. First our question will be; is there a common denominator to all this? Students of Islam answer in the affirmative: They discern a veritable flood of fundemantalist revivalist Islamic sentiment-fanatic, self-confident and xenohobic-inundating a growing number of muslim countries as Islam enters the fifteenth century of the muslim calendar. (November 20, 1979 marked the turn of the century)

Islam as the common creed of about 600 million people around the world gives many of its adherent different functions. One of them focuses on what is called "Islamic Dynamism". It is a cam-

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paign that involves a type of militant reaction by Muslims to the "Western" or in a broader sense to the "Foreign" challenge. Muslim guerrillas receive most of their financial support from Libya and Saudi Arabia.

The victory in Iran of Khomeini is a dramatic development in a movement of Islamic revival and Renaissance affect a total of 600 million Muslims. It professes to offer a political, economic and social system that provides a better alternative to both the Western and the Communist systems: one that Muslims can call their own, with the hope that it will bring the Islamic nations a new vitality and renewed pride in being Muslims. The West views this revival as a return to the archaic 7 th century AD. Its Muslim proponents believe it will propel the Islamic States into the twentieth century.

Muslim thinkers have been examining the Islamic way of life ever since the power of the Muslim States began to decline, first in India and later in the Ottoman Empire.

Drawing on Islam's vitality of religious feeling and clinging "to the original total Islam doctrine that state society and religion are one" and that "there is no such thing as the separation of church and state". The revival is being projected into politics. The old ideas of a permanent division of the entire world; into two ever hostile camps-true believers and infidels-have come to life again.

The new tide therefore means an assault against the existing world order as it has been formed by Western civilization in the modern era.

The life style of the West, its conventions (such as the immunity of diplomats and the protection of embassies), its materialism, its impact on education, its ideologies, its economic system all of which an earlier generation of Muslims wished to imitate-are now utterly rejected.

More than any other country, the US symbolizes all those features of Western civilization and Khomeini appeals to such emotions when he speaks of the US as "that Satanic power".

The fundamentalists censure ostentatious living, consumerism, corruption, lax morals and less than strict observance of prayer,

fasting and other religious commands. The impact of Western ideas, habits and schools of thought, is to their minds a "corrupting influence". Muslim rulers who cooperate with the West are therefore in their eyes not only the "lackeys of Imperialism" but are "enemies of Islam" and strugglers against God" to borrow two more phrases from political dictionaries of both Khomeini and the Muslim Brothers.

What is common to the fundamentalists, from Libya to Pakistan is their unquestioning readings to take political-an often enough violent political action, not only against foreigners but also against the authorities of Muslim states which do not measure up to their own standards of orthodoxy. When a minor radical Islamic group attacked the Egyptian army's technical college in Cairo in 1974, its members protested against Sedat's pro-American policies-but also demanded the establishment of a pure Islamic state in Egypt: religious law (Sharia) should become state law; the Egyptian policy should be modeled on early Islam and copy the political institutions which existed in the first Islamic century. (i.e. The Seventh Century A.D.) The motif of repeating the period of early Islam and in particular of the Righteous first four Caliphs, also occurs in the writings and speeches of both Khomeini and Qadhafi.

Khomeini's perceptions on Islamic State are expounded in a book entitled "Hukumate Islami-Islamic State". The government of the Umayyad (661-750) and Abbasid (750-1258) Caliphates are dismissed as anti-Islamic because they altered the early Islamic system of government and adopted a monarchical system. Khomeini does not speak of an Islamic State, but of an Islamic Republic. He is probably referring to the state created by the first four orthodox Caliphs, who were selected for life by the *biat*.

Qadhafi's "Third Universal Theory" constitutes the first chapter of his Green Book, first enunciated in a March 1973 speech. In March 1978, while celebrating the fifth anniversary of his "Third Universal Theory" speech, Qadhafi made clear his desire to abolish many of the "new" Islamic beliefs and to return Islam to strict fundamentalism-i.e belief in the Quran alone. He declared that he intended to revitalize Islam and unite all Muslims through Libya's involvement in the Arab, Islamic and International circles.

Similarly, the leader of the fanatic group which seized the Ka'ba Mosque at Mecca, reportedly called himself Muhammed son of Abdallah (The Prophet's name) and claimed to be descended from the Quraysh (the tribe of the Prophet). The implication being that he felt called upon to restore Islam to its original purity. He presented himself as the "Mahdi", a messianic figure who, it is believed, is a contemporary of the prophet who has been "hidden" for centuries and who reappears to return the straying flock to true Islam.

It is not coincidental that the present upsurge of Islamic sentiment occurs at the turn of a century according to the Muslim calendar. The ushering in of a new century in Islam has often aroused messianic expectations and heightened devotion. Khomeini joined those who condemned the attackers of the Kaba. They were, he said acting with the backing of "Zionism and Imperialism". But Khomeini's own radicalism has contributed to the spread of Islamic extremism-reaching out from Iran to other party of the Muslim world. Some of his closest associates have often spoken of the need to "Export" Iran's revolution to other Muslim countries. Bani-Sadr, Iran's first President said "Our revlution will not win if it is not exported. We are going to create a new order in which deprived people will not always be deprived and opressors will not always be opressors".

Such talk has created a great deal of anxiety in the Gulf emirates. They feel particularly vulnerable because they are geographically close to Iran and because most of them have considerable populations of Shiis who have traditional ties with the Iranian religious establishment.

Saudi internal services were cooperating with their counter parts in the emirates to prevent the revolution from spreading. The Arab Summit meeting at Tunis which met on the first day of the new century refused to allow an Iranian delegation into the meeting hall. The greatest fear of most ruling circles is that the religious fanatics will ally themselves with veteran political opposition elements who have for long awaited a chance to rid their countries of rulers whom they consider reactionary.

The occupation of the Kaba Mosque in Mecca by a group of religious extremists was an exceptional and totally new phenomenon of the Saudi political scene. Until this manifestation of Fundamentalist religious opposition, only two rather different types of opposition were thought to exist in Saudi Arabia. The one form of opposition was that which existed within the royal family itself. It was composed of young western-educated Princes who also advocated cautious liberal reforms.

A second form of opposition was which sought radical change and the overthrow of the existing "anachronistic" regime in Saudi Arabia by a "People's Republic". These groups were usually identified as being "anti-imperialist" i.e. opposed to Saudi Arabia's ties with the western powers. They were closely related to the radical leftist movements within the PLO—such as that headed by Dr. George Habash and by Nayif Hawatima.

The third form of opposition to the regime that which has surfaced with the attack in Mecca, appeared to have the making of a more formidable force. Its criticism of the regime was in terms of religion at a time when the so-called "Winds of Khomeini" were still gathering momentum in the muslim world. This could prove to be particularly dangerous to the Saudi regime, despite its own basically conservative religious character.

The relatively rapid process of modernization that Saudi society has been undergoing in recent years, has posed a serious dilemma to the Saudi leadership. The regime realized early the possible dangers inherent in the influence of foreign ideas and life styles on a traditional society imbued with religious norms and values.

It feared that too rapid a process of westernization could precipitate a breakdown of the traditional order and endanger the regime. But the regime while theoretically still adhering to dictates of the puritanical doctrines of Wahhabism has in practice deviated blatantly from these principles in recent years. The group that took over the Kaba Mosque in Mecca was protesting against cooperation between the regime and the religious establishment, based on deviation from puritanical Wahabism and an openness to the west in general.

This was a particularly dangerous challenge to a regime that bases its own legitimacy on religious precepts<sup>1</sup>.

## II

Since the Iranian Revolution revealed the formidable political potentialities of Islam, the question is being raised as to whether this "Islamic upsurge" could spill over to neighbouring Muslim countries.

The acuteness of the question lies in the fact that two of the major causes of the Islamic Revolution in Iran can be found in many Arab countries. First, there is rapid western-inspired economic development. It has brought about dislocation of the masses from their traditional environments, economic hardships in the form of inflation and unemployment, enrichment of small groups close to government; an influx of foreigners placed in positions of influence and an assault on traditional values and ways of life. For the social strata which constitute the main victims of such developments, "Islamic Radicalism" serves as almost the sole channel to express their grievances.

The second cause is the failure of modern nationalist ideologies, with exception of Kemalist Nationalism, to provide an effective system of beliefs to serve the needs of Islamic society. The low credibility of the secular national myths disseminated by the Shah's regime claiming a 2500 year continuity of national glory-is here paralleled by the failure of Nasserist type pan-Arabism to provide a working credo for the Arab masses. In spite of the Nasser's initial success growing aware ness of the unfeasibility of its program and its cumulative failures in politics have turned away many of its former followers, who seek today more credible solutions in fundamentalist Islam.

Of all the organizations in the Arab world that claim to give expression to this trend, the "Association of Muslim Brethren" known

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1) M.I.S. - Middle East Intelligence Survey, 16-30 November 1979.

as the "Muslim Brotherhood" is the most prominent opposition it has occupied ever, since its emergence in Egypt in the 1930's. After having been suppressed by the Nasser regime, the Muslim Brotherhood re-emerged under Sedat who wished to mobilize the support of traditional elements in society in order to counter balance the influence of leftists and Nasserists.

With their growing self-confidence, the Brethern have turned against the policies of President Sadat. They criticize the regime's liberal economic policy, its western orientation and th epeace treaty with Israel. As was the case in Iran, so the leftists in Egypt, who lack a similarly wide popular support, are seeking alliance with the radical Islamic movement.

While in the Egyptian Islamic movement terrorist activities have represented only a marginal element, In Syria terrorist actions particularly of "Shabab Muhammad-Muhammads Youth"an off spring of the Muslim Brotherhood, have attracted considerable attention. For in Syria, in addition to the basic trend of Islamic radicalism the movement also expresses the resentment of the Sunni Muslim majority against the Alawi clique in power; it constitutes, in fact, the major opposition force against Asad's regime. Shabab Muhammad's operations of sabotage and terror culminated later in the assassination of forty primarily Alawi artillery cadets in the Aleppo academy, executed by members of the movement who were themselves in the armed forces.

The continuing attacks on Soviet, advisers in Northern Syria and the attack in January 1980 on the Soviet airline office in Damascus was signal of change of tactics in the War of attrition being waged by the Muslim brotherhood against the Baathist regime of President Assad. The brotherhood has two reasons for deciding this time to select Soviet victims; first to protest violently against Soviet's invasion of Afghanistan; the second to try to create a breach between the Assad regime and its main supporters; i.e. Soviets.

The upsurge of Islamic radicalism can be observed in other Arab countries as well. In Morocco there has been a constant rise in the power of the Muslim Brotherhood. Tunisia too has experi-

enced an outburst of fundamentalist favour, especially aiming the youth. In Sudan the struggle continues between the "Mahdiyya" movement led by Sadiq al Mahdi and the Numayri regime. Of the particular interest is the influence of this trend within the various PLO fractions in Lebanon. There have been reports of the emergence of fundamentalist groups among Palestinian fedayeen, and pictures of Aya'tollah Khomeini can be seen in the offices of the fedayeen commanders. Yasir Arafat tends today more than in the past to colour his speeches with Islamic phrases. (The PLO, it will be recalled, calls officially, for the establishment of a democratic secular state in Palestine).

What then are the chances of a Khomeini-type upheaval in the Arab world? Can the Muslim Brotherhood effect a popular revolution of this kind in the Arab part of the Middle East as well?

While the signs of an Islamic upsurge in the Arab world are undeniable, there are many factors that nevertheless limit the potentialities of this movement in the Arab world. First; the record until now is of collaboration on the part of the Muslim Brotherhood with ruling dynasties of Western-oriented and politically conservative regimes. Furthermore, in the Arab world even the most modernistic governments unlike the Shahs regime show considerable respect for the Islamic factor and try to woo muslim elements by gestures and by proclamation of allegiance to the Islamic heritage. Sunni Islam, which it predominant in the Arab world is much more prone to collaboration with the government in power than the revolutionary-spirited and messianic Shia, and the Islamic establishment-the principal ulama, the judicial system and the institutions of higher learning-often function as a state bureaucracies and consistently endeavour to mobilize support for the government and legitimize its policies.

But in the final analysis, the greatest asset of the Islamic movement, is its endurance and perseverance. Even if it does not present an immediate danger to the existing order in the Arab world, it is certain to remain a constant challenge-one which is sure to surface in circumstances of major crisis.



## III

Islam has shown itself to be a major force in the political as well as the cultural and spiritual life of peoples. As Bernard Lewis rightly put it; The most important and only successful movement of resistance to the conquering and victorious West was in Anatolia where a group led by Mustafa Kemal defied the Allies, the Greeks and the subservient Ottoman Government. The later secularism and Nationalism of the Kemalists has obscured (replaced) the strongly Islamic character of the movement in its earlier stages, when its declared purposes were to free "Islamic lands" and "Islamic populations" - to liberate the Sultan - Caliph and eject the infidel invader. Muslim religious leaders from both the Ulema and the dervish orders were prominent among the founders and early supporters of the movement.

There were three of them among the nine sponsors of the famous "Society for the Defence of the Rights of Eastern Anatolia" founded in Erzurum in the summer of 1919, one of them was a Shayk of the Naqshbandi order. When the first Grand National Assembly met in Ankara 1920, 73 of its 361 members were professional men of religion, including 14 muftis and 8 leaders of dervish orders. In February 1921, the Shayk of the Sanusi order in Libya, who had joined the Kemalists three months previously, presided over a pan-Islamic congress in Sivas at which many Arab delegates were present.

In March 1921, the Grand National Assembly adopted as national anthem the first two stanzas of a deeply religious poem by Mehmed Akif "Poet of Islam" who had gone to Anatolia to join resistance. In April 1921 in occupied Istanbul a religious service was held in honour of the martyrs that had fallen in the holy war in Anatolia, and a young, westernized Turkish intellectual, under the strain of great emotion, was moved to reflect that the true home of his people was not the cultural lecture, the political meeting but the mosque. The mood changed however. The Sultan-Caliph in Istanbul refused to be liberated and he and his ulema hurled anathema at the rebels in Anatolia. Islam for the moment became identified with social reaction and political acquiescence. The Kemalists tur-

ned from religious to nationalist appeals and went far on the road to secularization. Their secularism was, so to speak, sanctified by success.

Among the defeated powers of the First World War, the Turks had succeeded in defying the victors and obtaining a negotiational peace on their own terms. Alone among the crushed people of Asia the Turks had been able drive out the invader and restore full national sovereignty. The effect of their success was comparable with that of the Japanese victory over Russia a generation earlier. The Japanese had taught the lessons of modernism and liberalism; the Kemalist Turks demonstrated the merits of secular nationalism and a new generation of leaders in the Arab lands and elsewhere was encouraged to defy the West and follow their example<sup>2</sup>.

Those concerned with Turkey in recent years have been struck by the new visibility of Islam. Today, as George S. Harris rightly pointed out, sects flourish in the Countryside the active observance of Muslim festivals has spread to the elite and religion is openly subjected to political manipulation.

Turkey has experienced perhaps the most thoroughgoing secular Revolution of any state in the Muslim world. Kemal Ataturk in establishing the Turkish Republic in 1923 agreed that Islam and "religious hierarchy" formed the paramount obstacle to modernization. This judgement seemed confirmed by the uprising in 1925 against the abolition of the Caliphate. Thus Ataturk moved not only to suppress the independent structure of folk Islam - the dervish orders but disestablished religion from the Constitution in 1928 and closed religious schools. The principle of secularism was established in the Constitution in 1937.

Turkey therefore in the, 1930's appeared an secular society. The vast majority of the civilian elite, who shared in the direction of the new Republic, supported the substitution of, Kemalist Nationalism in place of Islam. A small minority of the educated elite however, refused to accept Kemalist secularism. Moreover some of them ten-

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2) Bernard LEWIS, *The Middle East and The West*, New - York 1966, p. 107-108.

tered to the heresay of Pan Turanism—a design that violated the national prescriptions of the Turkish Republic. Their amalgam of extreme right-wing nationalism and Islam has continued to surface whenever conditions permit.

But the predominant secularism of the ruling urban class was not mirrored in the peasantry. Kemalism was a revolution of the elite. Atatürk concentrated his efforts on coopting and neutralizing opponents among the educated class. He recognized that the peasants presented no immediate threat to his modernization movement. He expected that the slow process of state-directed secular education would convert the majority. Folk Islam, however, was deeply embedded in the ways and customs of the peasantry. The Western Civil Code for marriage and divorce which was observed by the urban educated classes, was widely disregarded by peasants. Indeed, parliament was periodically obliged to pass laws legitimizing children of religious-style polygamous marriages.

The majority of the rural population adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam.

A significant Shiite minority also is found in Turkey, numbering between 15 and 20 percent of the population. Generally called Alewis, they maybe the descendants of the religious dissidents of the 16th century who in large imigrated to Iran under the pressure from Ottoman Empire. Turkish Alewis have in common with the Shiites of Iran an attachment to Muhammad's son in law Ali and his line as the legitimate succession to the prophet. The Prophet Muhammad who died in 632 A.D was not only a Prophet but also the political leader and lawgiver of the first Muslim Community (Medina) or state. Sunnis believe that he died without designating a successor or Caliph. Some maintained that Muhammad, before his death has designated Ali, his cousin and son in law to succeed him. Thus was born the "Shi'at Ali-The Party of Ali". Supporters of claims "Ali to the Caliphate" were termed Shi'is. In 680 A.D. troops of the Sunni Caliph killed Husayn the younger son of Ali on the field of Karbala in Iraq. By this act they gave the Shi movement a martyre-figure. During the month of Muharram Shis take mourning procession. But unlike the Shites in Iran, they are broadly "secular", regard the use of alcohol as permitted and disdain formal

worship services. Moreover as a minority in Turkey, they have a vested interest in the establishment of a secular state, where they would not have to conform to the religious practices of the Sunni majority.

While the Bektashis and Mevlevis dervish orders never openly challenging the Kemalist order, two other dervish organisations have been more actively at odds with the Republican regime. Of these the Nakshibandi order devoted to promulgating respect for religious law embodied in the Sharia. The Nakshibandis have been in the forefront of opposition to Westernization. It was devotees of this order that were held responsible for the Menemen affair in 1930, when religiously inspired mobs attacked a gendarme post in what the government charged, was the intended start of a general religious uprising. Far smaller than the Nakshibandis, but also dedicated to opposing Kemalist Republic are the Tijanis. Starting in 1949, its adherents launched attacks on statues of Atatürk and protested the ban on giving the call to prayer in Arabic.

Islam in Turkey has also experienced efforts at a general fundamentalist revival. Saidi Nursi founded a powerful religious movement to this end before his death in 1960. The Nurcular - "Lovers of Light" are found particularly among the Kurds, but also among religious conservatives in the Aegean and Konya areas. In and out of jail in the Republican era for opposition to secularism, Nursi preached the need to establish a theocratic state. He declared himself against all divisions of Islam and attempted to spread his movement outside of Turkey into Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. His successors exported the movement to Turkish workers in Germany.

Transition to multi party parliamentary democracy in 1945, made the masses the ultimate arbiter for political leadership. As a result, it was no longer possible for the rulers to ignore the desires of the peasantry. While the most urgent demands were for water and roads, rural population also sought religious education for youth, construction of new mosques and a return to Arabic as the language of religion.

In this situation laic approach of the Republican People's Party alienated voters. And to meet the competition of the Democrat

Party, the Republicans after 1947 moved to reinstitute voluntary courses in religion in primary school. They also revived the Faculty of Divinity in 1949, as a school of theology.

Yet these measures were seen as inadequate by the rural population. Soon after its victory in 1950 elections, the Democrat Government led by Adnan Menderes restored the call to prayer in Arabic and permitted religious radio broadcasts. In 1951, the Ministry of Education set up Imam-hatip (prayer leader and preacher) middle schools thus providing an alternative to the secular school system.

While these actions confirmed the image of the Democrat Party as the defender of the religious interests of the masses. They did not satisfy the extremists. Menderes was obliged to hail into court the editors of reactionary and pan-Islamic journals who demanded the abandonment of secularism.

The 1960's witnessed a broadening of the political spectrum in Turkey. On the one hand socialist ideas became respectable, while on the other spokesmen of the religious right gained new legitimacy.

The openness of the second Republic favored the free exercise of religious activity. Religion acquire additional political importance from the fragmentation of political representation in the parliament are to the fact that 1961 Electoral system was based on proportional representation. It was not long before splinter parties grew up reflecting Islamic interests. First of these was the Turkish Unity Party (TUP) founded in October 1966, reprseenting Alewi aspirations. Another excursion into religious politics was the creation of the National Salvation Party (NSP) under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan. The puritanical National Order Party which he established in 1970, was soon dissolved by the Constitutional Court for mixing religion in politics. After the 1973 elections when no party won an absolute majority in the lower house, Erbakan's 48 seats were the "key" to the formation of a viable government coalition. But following the party's poor showing in the 1977 elections, its ability to play role of linchpin in coalitions was lost. In the 1960's and 1970's the governments took some significant steps in the religious field.

The network of Imam-hatip religious training schools has been expanded and broadened in scope at the level of foreign policy as well the government has broken new ground. In order to gain support in the Cyprus Controversy, closer relations were established with Islamic countries. Turkey also took part in the Islamic summit meetings which began in 1969, both as a way to demonstrate to its allies a more balanced foreign policy, but also to meet desires from religious elements.

Religion has always been seen as the natural opponent of Communism. Hence it was understandable that Islamic elements would become involved in the growing violence between the ideological extremes.

By the late 1960's violent clashes between the Islamic right and extreme leftists were frequent. The post 1973-clashes also spread along, the Alewi-Sunni Divide. And it was in this atmosphere that the large scale communal killing in Kahraman Maras broke out in December 1978. This incident left over 100 killed in Turkey's largest sectarian conflict in recent memory. The origins of the Kahraman-maras affair lie in the right wing protest bombing of a leftist movie house. In conjunction with the funeral of two teachers killed in the initial incident, Sunnis and Alevis set upon each other, inflicting additional casualties and precipitating the imposition of martial law in 13 of Turkey's 67 provinces.

Religious problems are deeply enrooted in the Turkish political and social fabric. Only diminution of the bitter competition between the left and and right extremes would be likely to diminish the hostility of these religious communities.

But at the same time some dimensions of the religious factor in Turkish life appeared to be decreasing in significance. One of the lessons of the 1977 elections, which saw the sharp decline of the NSP and the virtual disappearance of TUP, would seem to be that religion has limited appeal to the broader electoral constituency. "Prayer rug" vote may well total considerably under 10 percent of the population. Thus the religiously conservative segment may not be able in future to play the political role it has in the recent past. In short, in Turkey today Islam can coexist with the secular Consti-

tutional order. And religion is no longer a factor that necessarily poses a serious threat to the political and social fabric of the country<sup>3</sup>.

For the present, those Turks who favour Communism or who follow Necmettin Erbakan's call for a return to the born of Islam, are a small minority.

#### IV

Islamic fundamentalism could become a domestic worry to the Kremlin. Its estimated 50 million Muslims make the Soviet Union the world's fifth largest Muslim State, after Indonesia (123.2 million), India (80 million), Pakistan (72.3 million) and Bangladesh (70.8 million). Turkey is sixth Muslim nation (43 million).

For the Kremlin, Muslims represent a demographic time bomb. By the year 2000, these will be an estimated 100 million Soviet Muslims, vs. about 150 ethnic Russians. Most of the Muslims live in areas of Central Asia, bordering on Iran, Afghanistan and China that were subjugated by Czarist armies only a little more than a century ago-Samarkand for example fell in 1868. The Soviets have soft pedaled anti-religious propaganda and allowed the Muslims to maintain mosques and theological schools. Consequently the Azerbaijanis, Turkmen, Uzbek and other Muslim minorities in the USSR could eventually become targets for Khomeini advocacy of an Islamic rebellion against all foreign domination of Muslims.

Yet Moscow can hardly ignore the opportunity presented by Khomeini's rise. An Iran sliding into anarchy, and a Middle East shaken by the furies of Khomeini's followers would offer the Soviets a chance to substitute their own influence for the Western presence that the Ayatullah's admirers and followers vow to expel. And the Middle East is an unparalleled geopolitical prize.

Whoever controls the Middle East's oil or the areas of Strait of Hormuz (40 miles wide at its narrowest) acquires a stranglehold on the world's economy. The USSR today is self-sufficient in oil but it

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3) George S. HARRIS, *Islam and the State in Modern Turkey*, *Middle East Review*, Summer 1979, p. 21-26.

could well become a major net importer in the 1980's and thus be in direct competition with the West. The warm-water ports so ardently desired by the Czars since the last century retain almost as much importance today. Soviet missile-firing submarines for example, now have to leave the ice-locked areas around Nurmansk and Archangel through narrow channels where they can easily be tracked by U.S. Submarine forces. They would be much harder to detect if they could slip out of ports on the Arabian sea.

The conflagration in Iran and the threat of renewed instability throughout the region, could open an entirely new chapter in the story of Soviet efforts to infiltrate the Middle East<sup>4</sup>.

I also believe that the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan must be viewed not only within the context of Soviet efforts to reach oil and warm ports but within the wider context of the USSR's involvement with Central Asian Islam.

On December 27, 1979 a coup d'etat took place in Afghanistan. Babrah Karmal a communist exile who was brought to the country earlier by a Soviet transport plane, was put in power. That night, Soviet troops took control of key areas of Kabul and President Hafizullah Amin was arrested and executed. In the fortnight some 100,000 Soviet troops have occupied Afghanistan and entered into a war against that country's tribal rebels.

The USSR's extreme reaction to events in Afghanistan can only be analyzed and understood in light of a number of complex facts and geopolitical developments involving Moscow, Kabul and Central Asian Islam.

The Soviets-from Brezhnev on down to the press and radio-insisted that their action was taken in response to an Afghan government request to defend it against an external threat from a third country. The Soviet Union claimed Brezhnev, responded to this request in accordance with its "friendship and cooperation treaty" with Afghanistan. It would withdraw its forces when they had completed their tasks.

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4) Man of the Year, Time, January 7, 1980.



Pravda detailed the Soviet claims on December 31; Rebel strong holds, it said, had been established in Pakistan, were Americans, Chinese and Egyptians were training the dissidents. The rebels had attacked Afghanistan from Pakistan territory. Both the government of Afghanistan and the Afghan Peoples Democratic Party had requested the Soviet aid.

The Soviet-Afghani treaty referred, to was signed on December 5, 1978. Some eight months a Marxist regime, under Nur Muhammad Taraki had come to power. Article four of that treaty states that the two side shall consult each other and take by agreement appropriate measures to ensure the security, independence and territorial integrity of the two countries.

The USSR has signed similar treaties in recent years with Angola, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Mozambique, South Yemen and Vietnam. Treaties with Egypt and Somalia have been cancelled unilaterally by those countries.

This is the first time one of these treaties has been invoked by the Soviets as the reason for military action. From an international legal standpoint, the weak point of the Soviet argument was that the President of Afghanistan at the moment of Invasion, was Hafizullah Amin and not Babrak Karmal. Amin's subsequent execution makes it impossible to verify the Soviet claim that he invited them into Afghanistan-even if the legal niceties still matter to anyone.

The geopolitical fact which distinguishes Afghanistan from Moscow's, other "friendship and cooperation" treaty partners, is the two countries long mutual border, and Afghanistan's historic role as a buffer between Imperial Russia and British India. Traditionally and geographically Afghanistan guards the route from Soviet Central Asia to the Indus River Valley, the Arabian sea and the Indian Ocean.

Afghanistan is a mosaic of peoples and tribes. Many of them are represented in Soviet Central Asia too. The close ethnic and linguistic ties between Afghans and Central Asian Soviets, long ago led the USSR to employ reliable Soviet Tajiks whose dialect is understood by most Afghani Pathans as well as advisors in Afghani

Ministries. The Soviet soldiers sent into Afghanistan include a large proportions of Tajiks, Uzbeks and other Central Asian Soviet peoples. The fathers and grandfathers of the Soviet Central Asian soldiers were well acquainted with Afghanistan.

In the 1920's and early 1930's an anti-Soviet muslim guerilla movement, the Basmachi took refuge inside Afghani territory between raids on Red Army outposts in Soviet Central Asia.

At that time, the Kabul government was friendly to the USSR, but its control over borders areas then, as now, was limited. The Soviet experience with the Basmachis left bitter memories in Moscow and these have undoubtedly influenced the Russian's decision to move forthrightly and aggressively against the Muslim regime in Kabul. But even extended instability among Afghanistan's tribes could, the Soviets reasoned, cause unrest in Soviet Central Asia. In short, it was the danger that Afghanistan would cease to be a "non aligned satellite" that caused the Russians to move in.

Dreams of reaching the Indian Ocean's "warm waters" and thoughts of exploiting America's passive image in the region may have contributed to Soviet considerations but they were peripheral.

The Soviets invaded Afghanistan and installed Babrak Karmal another Marxist militant because Hafizullah Amin and the Afghan army could no longer guarantee their minimal demands for stability.

If, on the other hand the Russians become embroiled in close battles with the rebels they may remain in Afghanistan for an extended period of time.

Moreover the scope and timing of Western, Chinese and Muslim aid to the Afghani rebels and the intensity of anti-Soviet feelings in the Muslim world, have considerable influence on the lessons the Soviets learn from their Afghan adventure. These factors could well determine whether the Soviets set off soon on similar adventures elsewhere in the Middle East and Africa<sup>5</sup>.

Since 1955 the Middle East has ceased to be an area of exclusively western influence. It is not likely to become so again. By

5) MIS - Middle East Intelligence Survey, 1-15 January 1980.

revulsion from more than a century and a half of Western influence and domination, the Muslim attitude to the West become generally hostile. In contrast, the Muslim attitude to Russia has been emotionally neutral.

As the Russians become involved in the Middle East they lost their initial advantages and were encountering suspicious resentments and frustrations familiar to their western predecessors and counterparts.

There are serious signs that Soviet invasion of Afghanistan may cause replacement of anti-Western hostility by anti-Soviet hostility in all Muslim world. Virtually all other Muslim countries except Syria and South Yemen were critical of the Soviet Intervention. Pakistan, with the largest frontier adjoining Afghanistan and a strongly Muslim government reacted most sharply to the Soviet invasion: A Pakistan government statement on 29 December said "its concern is all the more profound since the country which has been subjected to military intervention is an Islamic country, is our immediate neighbour and is a member of the Islamic Conference as well as the non-aligned movement..."

The Iranian Foreign Ministry sent a letter to the Soviet government referring specifically to Afghanistan's position as Iran's neighbour and fellow Muslim country, which meant that the Soviet military intervention was against all Moslems in addition to constituting an antagonistic act against the Afghan people.

Iraq's official thinking was reflected in President Saddam Hussain's army day speech on 6 January and in an editorial in the newspaper *Al Thawra* (4 January) noting that Soviet involvement in the coup which brought Abdul Fattah Ismail to power in South Yemen (PDRY) had raised questions in Arab minds about Soviet intentions, it said that the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was now causing widespread concern. In Jeddah on 6 January the Saudi Arabian Foreign Affairs Minister said that all Islamic and Third world countries were threatened by the danger. The influential newspaper *Al Riyadh* suggested that the Islamic states should give the Muslim insurgents in Afghanistan moral, material and military support.

Turkey, in a statement issued after a council of Ministers meeting on 29 December, said that the coup-in which many Soviet troops had participated-constituted dangerous interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs and a threat to peace and stability in the region and in the world.

Since the Islamic world is no more homogenous than the Christian one, it needed the "shock effect" of Soviet invasion to weld it into near unanimity; The 36 nations and organisations meeting in Islamabad joined together in denouncing, on 28 January 1980, the Soviet Unions "military aggression" in Afghanistan and in calling for Russia's immediate and unconditional withdrawal.

The Islamic Conference Organisation (The official name of the 42 member body that met from 27 to 29 January 1980 in Pakistan) was on easier ground in condemning the Soviet Invasion than in deciding what to do about it: 11 members resisted the call to envisage not taking part in the Moscow Olympic Games. The Islamic countries committed themselves to help Afghanistan's neighbours and Afghan refugees. Since there is no clear dividing line between Afghan refugees and Afghan rebels this was conference expression of support for the rebels.

The Muslim Guerrillas have a savage nuisance value but, unless the Soviet invasion has shocked them into cohesion, they are far from the "Holy War" that they claim. In order to avoid a United anti-Russian campaign Babrak Karmal, the Afghan president installed by the Russians, try to convince his fellow-Moslems that he is committed to Islam no less than to revolution.

On 5 February Babrak Karmal has proclaimed an amnesty for 448 people jailed on criminal charges to mark the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. The move appeared to be part of the Marxist leader's attempt to win the confidence of the country's Muslim population.

Islamic countries, some of them after raw experience are on their guards against Soviet Union. Witness, the resolution introduced by Somalia, once Russia's good friend, condemning the presence of Russian and allied troops in the Horn of Africa.

But so long as US continues to be incapable of persuading the Israeli Government to come up with a decent proposal for solving the Palestinian question, the Arabs, whatever their other interests, will have reservations in dealing with Israel's only strong friend; i.e. US.

As "The Economist" rightly put it the conclusion seems to be that Brezhnev's politburo—a body of 14 old men (average age 70) whose view of the world has not changed for years, took their Afghan decision mainly because they judged that the seizure of Afghanistan would put the Soviet Union in a better position to exploit the turmoil in South-West Asia to the disadvantage of the West. This is why it is important for the Western cum. Moslem response to the invasion to be as strong and united as possible.

The more evident it becomes, that Soviet Union has paid a painful price for Brezhnev's Afghan policy, the less likely Brezhnev's successors are to do such things again. In trying to find a way of living with Russia the world is now approximately where it was with Hitler's Germany in late 1936. If the world had done in 1936 what Mr. Carter is trying to do now, would the clock have ticked inexorably on to war in 1939?<sup>6</sup>

## V

It would be wrong to dismiss the wave of Islamic revival now sweeping through the Islamic world as an exclusively "reactionary religious movement". Rather, it should be seen as an effort on the part of an important segment of mankind to deal with its world on its own terms. Unfortunately however, because there are so many Muslim States, this Islamic revival may become a game played by these states to prove which is the most Islamic.

If there is going to be a conflict of ideologies in the Islamic world it will be between the forces of Islam, Marxism and Nationalism. Arab Islam must recognize and emphasize those values which unite it with other religions and cultures rather than those which separate it from them. The goals must include working toward

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6) Did I do Something, The Economist, February 2, 1980.

a human world order. Otherwise Islamic strength can create alarm and concern.

The only alternative to continued turmoil with unforeseeable consequences is a retreat from fanaticism and a return to rationalism and pragmatism.

As Alfred Gaillaume, an expert on Islamic theology, put it; "The day may come when Muslims and Christians will realize that they have so much in common that they need no longer regard one another with suspicion and dislike".<sup>7</sup>

7) Alfred GUILLAUME, *Islam*, Denguin Books, 1978, p. 199.