Talking to the Muslim world: how, and with whom?

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One challenge, wrapped in a bigger one

The struggle against terrorism in the Middle East has led to a quest to find ways to counter the normative appeal[1] of violent extremists, especially the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). There is widespread recognition that ISIS has a very effective normative position, as indicated by the facts that it strongly motivates its rank and file; has persuaded many thousands of young Muslims from around the world to join its ranks; and has considerable appeal in parts of the Muslim world. Several analyses of ISIS's normative appeal focus on its ability to exploit social media; however, much of its appeal derives not from the tools and platforms it leverages but from the underlying message that it broadcasts. Boaz Ganor, the executive director of the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, writes: 'IS [ISIS] captivates these young people, not only by virally disseminating its messages of victory and barbarism, but also, and perhaps mainly, by inviting them to join an alternative conceptual system.'[2] Psychologist John Horgan finds that ISIS recruits typically feel 'a very, very strong moral pull ... [a] passionate need to right some perceived wrong, to address some sort of injustice, to restore honor to those from whom it's been taken'.[3] Although the vast majority of the Muslim world opposes ISIS, there are significant minorities in several very disparate countries that seem to support the organization. A Pew Global Attitudes Survey in spring 2015 found that 20 per cent of Nigerian Muslims and 12 per cent of Malaysian Muslims had 'favorable' opinions of ISIS, with corresponding proportions for Pakistan and Senegal standing at 9 per cent and 11 per cent respectively.[4] Although small minorities, these percentages repre-

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1 I use the term 'normative' to refer to value-based conceptions and communications. Other terms such as 'ideology', 'propaganda' or 'messaging' are prejudicial and tend to assume posturing rather than the advocacy of a true believer.

2 Boaz Ganor, 'Four questions on ISIS: a "trend" analysis of the Islamic State', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9: 3, June 2015, pp. 56–64.

3 Quoted in Jesse Singal, 'Why ISIS is so terrifyingly effective at seducing new recruits', *New York Magazine*, 18 Aug. 2014, http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2014/08/how-isis-seduces-new-recruits.html. Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 18 Sept. 2016.

4 Jacob Poushter, 'In nations with significant Muslim populations, much disdain for ISIS', Pew Research Center, 17 Nov. 2015, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/17/in-nations-with-significant-muslim-populations-much-disdain-for-/ISIS.

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sent millions of Muslims around the world who support ISIS at least to some extent.

The United States lacks a compelling normative response to ISIS's appeal in the Muslim world. Charlie Winter writes: 'This war [against ISIS] cannot be won through military and political means alone; it is as much a war of information and propaganda as anything else and, currently, it is fatally imbalanced to the advantage of Islamic State.'[5] Christina Schori Liang, a senior fellow at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, put it more simply: 'We need a compelling story that makes our story better than theirs, and so far their story is trumping ours.'[6]

The challenge posed by ISIS's normative position is part of a much greater challenge concerning how the West should speak to and with the Muslim world. There is general agreement that the United States has not found an effective way to 'win hearts and minds'[7] in the Muslim world. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs noted in a 2010 report that ongoing theological debates within several religions, including Islam, will have profound foreign policy consequences, but warned that 'the United States often lacks the capacity to understand even the broad contours of such debates, much less the subtleties and nuances of religious history, theological argument, and cultural context'.[8] Hady Amr and Peter Warren Singer of the Brookings Institution had earlier pointed out that:

> By any measure, America's efforts at communicating with Muslim-majority nations since 9/11 have not been successful. The efforts have lacked energy, focus, and an overarching, integrated strategy. Instead, the efforts have relied on informational programming that has lacked priority or been misdirected, lacked nuance in dealing with diverse and sensitive issues, and not reached out to the key 'swing' audiences necessary to marginalize and root out violent extremists.[9]

Freud argued that there are no accidents; when people act in ways that seem ineffectual or illogical, there are often underlying causes that drive such behaviour. I suggest the same holds for governments and nations. The reason the United States is doing so poorly in countering the message of ISIS and in communicating

[5] Charlie Winter, *The virtual 'caliphate': understanding Islamic State's propaganda strategy* (London: Quilliam, July 2015), http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/the-virtual-caliphate-understanding-islamic-states-propaganda-strategy.pdf.

[6] Quoted in Eric Geller, 'Why ISIS is winning the online propaganda war', *The Daily Dot*, 29 March 2016, http://www.dailydot.com/politics/-terrorism-social-media-internet-countering-violent-extremism/.

[7] This often-repeated phrase first used during the Vietnam War re-entered into popular use following the release in 2003 of the report of the State Department's Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, often called the Djerejian Report. See Congress, House of Representatives, Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, *Changing minds, winning peace: a new strategic direction for U.S. public diplomacy in the Arab & Muslim world*, Oct. 2003, http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/24882.pdf.

[8] R. Scott Appleby, Richard Cizik and Thomas Wright, *Engaging religious communities abroad: a new imperative for US Policy*, report of the Task Force on Religion and the Making of US Foreign Policy (Chicago: Council on Global Affairs, 2010).

[9] Hady Amr and P. W. Singer, *Engaging the Muslim world: a communication strategy to win the war of ideas* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2007), http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2007/4/11islamicworld-singer-opp08/pb_muslimworld_psinger.pdf. Steven Kull notes that US diplomats are particularly ill equipped to understand this conflict, as they are predisposed to view conflicts as primarily between organized groups. See Steven Kull, 'The inner clash of civilizations within the Muslim ummah', in Karim H. Karim and Mahmoud Eid, eds, *Engaging the other: public policy and western–Muslim intersections* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 133–50.

with the Muslim world is not because the people at the State Department are witless or lacking in dedication to their task. There are deep underlying issues that explain why they are bound to fail. Once these are better understood, we might be better positioned to suggest what might be done and by whom. These issues are the subject of the next section of this article.

Components of US normative strategy

The United States' normative position towards the Islamic world draws on three basic elements:

1. The value of keeping religious life limited to the private sphere and out of politics (typically referred to as separation of church or mosque and state), and the value of a rational, secular approach to nature, society and the self.
2. The value of free markets and capitalism as a means of achieving the good life. This life is often viewed as requiring a high level of economic growth in order to provide millions of people with a large variety of consumer goods and services—in short, an affluent life.
3. The virtues of human rights and democracy, often referred to as liberal democracy.

The three positions are promoted within the Muslim world in different ways. Liberal democracy is most explicitly promoted by the US government through a variety of agencies including the State Department, the National Endowment for Democracy, publicly funded broadcasters such as Voice of America and Radio Sawa, and various NGOs—and in several key cases has been promoted by the US military and the CIA, including through regime change. Secularism is promoted much more implicitly, as we shall see, but by the same agencies and NGOs. Capitalism is promoted by various agencies and divisions within the State Department and Department of Commerce, by private lobbies such as the US Chamber of Commerce, and by the World Bank and IMF (in which the US plays a leadership role).[10] Above all, the view of what Americans consider the good life, and believe others could gain if they worked hard, is promoted very effectively through American movies and TV programmes and by tourists. According to a study of 'Media in the Middle East' carried out by Northwestern University in Qatar in 2016, at least half of respondents in Lebanon, Qatar and UAE said they watched American movies, and in Egypt more respondents said they watched American movies than said they watched movies from Arab countries.[11] It may be said that Americans 'ooze' the conception of affluent life as a good life in a way that supplements, and in many ways eclipses, the US government's explicit messaging.

[10] Rajiv Chandresakaran gives a particularly striking view of US attempts to promote capitalism immediately after the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. See Rajiv Chandresakaran, *Imperial life in the Emerald City: inside Iraq's Green Zone* (New York: Vintage, 2007), and *Little America: the war within the war for Afghanistan* (New York: Knopf, 2012).

[11] Northwestern University in Qatar and Doha Film Institute, 'Media use in the Middle East 2016: a six nation survey', http://www.mideastmedia.org/survey/2016/uploads/file/NUQ_Media_Use_2016_Final_Full_Demo.pdf.

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The precariousness of secularism

David Hume wrote in *The natural history of religion* in 1757 that: 'The primary religion of mankind arises chiefly from an anxious fear of future events; and what ideas will naturally be entertained of invisible, unknown powers, while men lie under dismal apprehensions of any kind, may easily be conceived.'[12] This Enlightenment view of religion as a vestige of an earlier, more primitive age, akin to witchcraft, alchemy and sorcery, influenced the founders of the United States, as did their experience with the powerful, established Anglican church in Great Britain. These factors, as well as the quest for tolerance on the part of groups that practised different versions of Christianity, led the founders to embed the separation of church and state in the US constitution.

The anthropological view of religion in turn held that humans would ultimately evolve beyond religion. Anthropologist Anthony Wallace wrote in 1966 that: 'Belief in supernatural beings and in supernatural forces that affect nature without obeying nature's laws will erode and become only an interesting historical memory.'[13] And although Americans privately were and are more religious than the citizens of most (if not all) other developed nations, only a minority support establishing an official state religion.[14]

The same core idea guides US foreign policy. Sheherazade Jafari writes:

> This incomplete understanding [by government officials] of such a powerful socio-cultural force stems in part from the historical western assumption that secularism naturally follows modernism, and will eventually catch on across the world as other countries develop. Today, the US tradition of separation between church and state is so central to its national identity that many government officials express discomfort with having anything to do with the topic of religion.[15]

Conversely, Shadi Hamid writes in his book *Islamic exceptionalism:*

> Because the relationship between Islam and politics is distinctive, a replay of the Western model—Protestant Reformation followed by an enlightenment in which religion is gradually pushed into the private realm—is unlikely. That Islam—a completely different religion with a completely different founding and evolution—should follow a similar course as Christianity is itself an odd presumption.[16]

Elizabeth Hurd argues that the West misunderstands Islam because it sees it through the lens of laicism (complete separation of politics and religion). In contrast, the Judaeo-Christian tradition draws on religion to provide a norma-

[12] David Hume, *The natural history of religion and dialogues concerning natural religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 81.
[13] Anthony Wallace, *Religion: an anthropological view* (New York: Random House, 1966).
[14] In recent years, various polls have consistently found the percentage of respondents who support making Christianity the official religion in the United States to be in the low 30s. See e.g. http://big.assets.huffingtonpost.com/toplines_churchstate_0403042013.pdf; http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/pdf/2015/Religion-PollingResults.pdf.
[15] Sheherazade Jafari, 'Local religious peacemakers: an untapped resource in US foreign policy', *Journal of International Affairs* 61: 1, 2007, pp. 111–30.
[16] Shadi Hamid, *Islamic exceptionalism: how the struggle over Islam is reshaping the world* (New York: St Martin's, 2016), p. 5.

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tive framework for politics which embraces secularism.[17] It is indeed possible that Islam could develop in this way, or indeed that in some places it already has—for example, in the Turkey of a decade ago, though less so today. However, in the first place, polls suggest that a large number of Muslims favour a greater role for religion in the political realm (a point discussed below); and in the second place, when it comes to convictions about specific matters, one believes either in supernatural accounts ('it was meant to be') or in secular ones ('data show'), and this distinction holds true for Muslims as it does for adherents to other religions.

Thus, in its dealings with Muslim-majority countries, the United States keeps looking for allies that are secular and seeks to ensure that they too will separate state and religion. Secretary of State John Kerry stated in 2015: 'We all agree that it's imperative to save the state of Syria and the institutions on which it is built and preserve a united and *secular* Syria.'[18] When Hosni Mubarak was swept from office by the 2011 Tahrir Square protests, Howard Berman, then the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, stated: 'As this change takes hold, we must keep firmly in mind that our goals include an Egypt that supports close relations with the United States; supports the welfare of the Egyptian people, including democracy and universal human rights; [and] is *secular* in orientation.'[19] In Iraq, USAID contractors tasked with reforming the education system sought to remove religious references from textbooks.[20]

The strong preference for secular forces and the quest to establish separation of state and religion in the Muslim world ignore the fact that, far from fading, religion is actually growing and playing a much greater role in many regions of the world—especially among Muslims. Polls show that the majority of Muslims want religion to play a *greater* role in public life, and want a state that is *more* influenced by Islam, not less. In Russia, after decades in which communist governments used the educational system, cultural products and the media to suppress religion, communism has faded but the church is resurgent: in 2014, 72 per cent of Russians identified as Orthodox Christian, up from 31 per cent when the Soviet Union disbanded in 1991.[21] In China, the number of Protestants alone has grown by 10 per cent per year since 1979, and China may well soon have a larger Christian population than any other country in the world.[22] Hinduism has always had, and continues to have, a key role in India, a fact highlighted by the election of the current Hindu nationalist government; meanwhile the numbers of Muslims and Christians in India are also growing. In Latin America and Africa, the Catholic and Anglican

[17] Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The politics of secularism in international relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[18] John Kerry, remarks at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 28 Oct. 2015, http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/10/248937.htm (emphasis added).

[19] Howard Berman, 'Recent developments in Egypt and Lebanon: implications for US policy and allies in the broader Middle East, Part I', US House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 9 Feb. 2011, https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg64483/pdf/CHRG-112hhrg64483.pdf (emphasis added).

[20] Amitai Etzioni, *Security first: for a muscular, moral foreign policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

[21] Pew Research Center, 'Russians return to religion, but not to church', 10 Feb. 2014, http://www.pewforum.org/2014/02/10/russians-return-to-religion-but-not-to-church/.

[22] Eleanor Albert, 'Christianity in China', Council on Foreign Relations, 7 May 2015, http://www.cfr.org/china/christianity-china/p36503.

churches have long held sway over politics, but are currently being challenged by the rise, not of secularism, but of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Polling indicates that a majority of Muslims in many countries would like to see Islam and, specifically, Islamic law, play a *greater* role in their lives. A Pew Research Center survey asked Muslims in 2015 whether they wanted Islamic law (shari'a) to be the official law of the land in their country. Nearly all Muslims in Afghanistan (99 per cent) and most in Iraq (91 per cent) and Pakistan (84 per cent) supported shari'a law as official law. In the largest Muslim-majority countries in the world, there was significant support for making shari'a law official: in Indonesia, 72 per cent were in favour; in Bangladesh, 84 per cent; in Nigeria, 71 per cent; and in Egypt, 74 per cent.[23] Polling data from the Arab Barometer Surveys found that, across seven different Arab countries, 34 per cent of respondents said they preferred shari'a law without democracy, and 41 per cent said they supported both. Only a small minority (14 per cent) said they supported democracy without shari'a law.[24] The role of Islam is growing significantly in countries where it was once thought to be weakening, such as Turkey and Tunisia.[25] The rise of political Islam should not be too surprising, as 'secularism' is an extremely fraught concept in the Islamic world; in many countries, secularism is synonymous with repression, from 'Kemalist' Turkey to Bourguiba's Tunisia.[26]

Given the resurgence of religion globally as a political force and the particular antipathy towards secularism in much of the Muslim world, the US government is swimming against very powerful historical currents when it seeks to find and ally itself with secular groups in the Muslim world and to promote separation of mosque and state.

Promoting the good life

The contention that the prevailing American normative message to the Muslim world entails extolling consumerism as a means to attaining the good life may seem unsupported and overly critical. However, the US government has exhorted and pressurized other countries to open up markets to foreign investment, privatize state-owned corporations, deregulate industries and otherwise embrace neo-liberal capitalism. These efforts are justified on the grounds that such changes

[23] Michael Lipka, 'Muslims and Islam: key findings in the US and around the world', Pew Research Center, 7 Dec. 2015, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/07/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/.

[24] Sabri Ciftci, 'Secular–Islamist cleavage, values, and support for democracy and shari'a in the Arab world', *Political Research Quarterly* 66: 4, 2012, pp. 781–93. The Arab Youth Survey conducted by ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller asked 3,500 young Arabs in 16 different countries whether they agreed with the statement 'Religion plays too big a role in the Middle East', and found that majorities or pluralities said 'yes'. However, the text of the question is much more ambiguous than the one asked by Pew (asking about the 'Middle East' rather than the respondents' particular countries and leaving 'role' open to interpretation by the respondent rather than asking specifically about implementation of shari'a law). Moreover, the Arab Youth Survey asked the question about the role of religion in the context of Sunni–Shi'i conflict in the region. See http://www.arabyouthsurvey.com/en/home.

[25] For further discussion, see R. Hirschl, *Constitutional theocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[26] Rachid Al-Ghannouchi, 'Secularism in the Arab Maghreb', in Azzam Tamimi and John L. Esposito, eds, *Islam and secularism in the Middle East* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 97–124.

would lead to higher economic growth, which in turn would enable the nations involved to provide their people with more goods and services, and thereby with a growing measure of the kind of affluence that Americans enjoy.

As noted above, the US disseminates this message through the portrayal of American life in the movies and television programmes that are viewed by significant portions of the Muslim world. American pop culture remains popular even where American foreign policy is decidedly not: a Pew poll in 2013 found that only 7 per cent of Shi'i Muslims in Lebanon had a favourable overall view of the United States, but nevertheless half had a favourable opinion of American pop culture.[27] Muslims also learn about the American consumerist lifestyle from observing tourists and business travellers who visit their countries. In addition, the US government contracts PR and communications firms to portray the allure of capitalist affluence abroad.[28]

The promotion of the American conception of the good life—and what constitutes a 'higher standard of living'—is explicitly favoured by the US government as a way to counter the appeal of radical extremist Islam, and to 'drain the swamp' in which terrorism festers. For example, in 2014, John Kerry stated that: 'We have a huge common interest in dealing with this issue of poverty, which in many cases is the root cause of terrorism.'[29] A decade earlier, Richard Sokolsky and Joseph McMillan of the National Defense University concluded that:

> Although there is a great deal we do not understand about the causes of terrorism, one major factor is clear: the historic failure of development in a swath of countries running from North Africa to Pakistan. Our foreign assistance should go up by at least $4 billion to $5 billion annually to finance programs that promote modernization and economic opportunity in the Islamic countries of the Middle East and Central and South Asia.[30]

Others, including Hillary Clinton, have called for a 'Marshall Plan for the Middle East', to develop the region economically and politically.[31] True, these drives are favoured not merely as a way to prevent terrorism but also in order to alleviate human suffering. However, the good intentions do not make them more realistic.

This element of American normative messaging fails on several grounds. First, the data consistently fail to show a link between material deprivation and terrorism. For example, political scientist James Piazza's study of terrorist incidents in 96 different countries between 1986 and 2002 found no statistically significant correlation between any measures of economic development and terrorism.[32] Peter

[27] Richard Wike, 'American star power still rules the globe', Pew Research Center, 22 Feb. 2013, http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/02/22/american-star-power-still-rules-the-globe/.

[28] For example, in Kazakhstan, USAID hired Burson-Marsteller, the world's largest PR firm, to develop a soap opera to sell capitalism and privatization to the people. See Amy Chua, *World on fire: how exporting free market democracy breeds ethnic hatred and global instability* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

[29] John Kerry, remarks after meeting with Secretary of State of the Holy See Pietro Parolin, Rome, 14 Jan. 2014, http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/01/219654.htm.

[30] Richard Sokolsky and Joseph McMillan, 'Foreign aid in our own defense', *New York Times*, 12 Feb. 2002.

[31] Hillary Rodham Clinton, 'Secretary Clinton receives the 2011 George C. Marshall Foundation Award', 2 June 2011, http://m.state.gov/md164943.htm.

[32] James A. Piazza, 'Rooted in poverty? Terrorism, poor economic development, and social cleavages', *Terrorism*

Bergen and Swati Pandey's research undermines the putative link between the inaccessibility of higher education and terrorism, as their study of 79 terrorists found that 54 per cent had a university degree or at least some college education (compared to 52 per cent of Americans with the same level of education). Bergen and Pandey conclude that: 'History has taught that terrorism has been a largely bourgeois endeavor.'[33]

Second, efforts by the United States, the World Bank and other major donors to develop the economies of less developed countries have a less than impressive track record. Indeed, many developing countries that have received considerable foreign assistance for decades have developed much more slowly than others that have received much less aid, such as China and the so-called Asian tigers (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan).[34] The scores of billions of dollars that the United States invested in the development of Afghanistan and Iraq were largely lost to corruption, mismanagement and civil unrest. Ömer Taşpınar of the Brookings Institution adds:

> Absolute deprivation is not the real challenge. The more challenging question, particularly in the Arab world, is relative deprivation: the absence of opportunities relative to expectations. Such focus on relative deprivation is important because poverty is no longer an absolute concept in the context of globalization. Globalization creates an acute awareness about opportunities available elsewhere. This leads to frustration, victimization, and humiliation among growing cohorts of urbanized, undereducated, and unemployed Muslim youth who are able to make comparisons across countries.[35]

Last but not least, many devout Muslims believe that Americans worship at the altar of consumer goods rather than that of God. They view their own conception of the good life—living by the dictates of the Qur'an (and *hadith*)—as morally superior to a life of western 'hedonist materialism'. An early and oft-quoted example of American wealth and excess scandalizing an Arab intellectual and shaping his world-view is the sojourn of Sayyid Qutb in the United States. Qutb studied in Greeley, Colorado, in 1949, and his experiences there 'prompted him to condemn America as a soulless, materialistic place that no Muslim should aspire to live in'. Qutb went on to become an early leader of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the author of its political philosophy. In his work, *Milestones*, Qutb wrote:

> The leadership of mankind by the West is now on the decline, not because Western culture has become poor materially or because its economic and military power has become weak. The era of the Western system has come to an end primarily because it has lost those life-giving values that enabled it to be the leader of mankind.[36]

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and Political Violence 18: 1, 2006, pp. 159–77.

[33] Peter Bergen and Swati Pandey, 'The madrassa scapegoat', *Washington Quarterly* 29: 2, 2006, pp. 115–25.

[34] For a fuller discussion of the failures of foreign assistance, see Dambisa Moyo, *Dead aid: why aid is not working and how there is a better way for Africa* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2009); William Russell Easterly, *The elusive quest for growth: economists' adventures and misadventures in the tropics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

[35] Ömer Taşpınar, 'Fighting radicalism, not "terrorism": root causes of an international actor redefined', *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 29: 2, 2009, pp. 75–86.

[36] Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (rev. trans.) (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1990), pp. 5–6.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini made similar pronouncements in his famous epistle to Mikhail Gorbachev. Khomeini wrote: 'The basic problem of your country has nothing to do with ownership, the economy, or freedom: it is the lack of a true belief in God, the same problem that has drawn the West into a blind alley of triviality and purposelessness.'[37] Marx referred to religion as the opiate of the masses, leading them to accept their misery and passivity. It may be the elixir of life for the hundreds of millions for whom economic improvement will come slowly, especially the large proportion of the Muslim population that is young. Encouraging these young people to aspire to a Hollywood lifestyle in countries where little work can be found seems a message more likely to lead to alienation than to mutual understanding.

Promoting liberal democracy

Attempts to promote democracy and human rights around the world have a long history as a major element of American diplomacy, going back at least as far as Woodrow Wilson. Wilson envisioned the League of Nations as the centrepiece of a global order that would be based on democratic principles and the promotion of liberal regimes in the nations of the world. More recently, neo-conservatives championed the export of democracy to foreign lands. After the collapse of the USSR, whose constituent former republics were assumed to be rushing towards forming liberal democracies, the neo-conservatives assumed that authoritarian rulers were the last barriers preventing a world of flourishing democracy. Francis Fukuyama asserted in *The end of history* that western liberal democracy was the final stage of evolution towards which all political regimes were converging. Carl Gershman, president of the National Endowment for Democracy, wrote:

> Underpinning the consensus on democracy promotion is the idea that democracy is an universal value, and that people throughout the world, in developing and developed countries alike, admire democracy and want it for their own reasons, and not because the United States wants them to be democratic for *its* reasons.[38]

Neo-conservatives held that, if authoritarian regimes did not crumble under their own weight, the United States was called upon to use its might to topple them, allowing their freed peoples to establish democracies in their wake.[39]

US experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq have demonstrated that democratic institutions cannot function without certain necessary underlying sociological conditions. Moreover, as Hamid notes, liberalism and democracy coincided for much of western history, and thus have been conflated; however, they are in fact two very different concepts, and even in the West, liberalism had to precede democracy.[40]

[37] Abdar Rahman Koya, *Imam Khomeini: life, thought and legacy* (Selangor, Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust, 2009).
[38] Carl Gershman, 'Democracy as policy goal and universal value', *Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* 6: 1, Winter–Spring 2005, pp. 19–38.
[39] Robert Kagan and William Kristol wrote that the possibility of the US using its power to usher in democratic regime change from Iraq to China was 'eminently realistic': see Robert Kagan and William Kristol, *Present dangers: crisis and opportunity in American foreign and defense policy* (San Francisco: Encounter, 2000), p. 20.
[40] Hamid, *Islamic exceptionalism*.

These conditions are absent in large parts of the Muslim (and especially Arab) world. Often, advocates of democratic regime change in the Middle East point to the example of post-Second World War Germany and Japan as evidence that democratic institutions can be successfully imported by outsiders. In fact, even a cursory review of what happened in these two nations illustrates a lack of parallels to the present case. Both Japan and Germany had a strong national identity and sense of national unity; in contrast, many Middle Eastern countries whose borders were arbitrarily drawn by colonial powers are riven by internal strife and sectarian loyalties. In both Germany and Japan, the foreign occupation was widely viewed as legitimate; and both had solid economic fundamentals, such as a highly educated workforce and established infrastructure. Above all, democracy-building started only after all opposing forces were defeated and all hostilities had ceased.

In recent years, both the United States and the World Bank have scaled back their political development programmes. They now tend to favour 'merely' state-building rather than nation-building. They are looking for stable states, and seeking to make governments more effective and less corrupt rather than necessarily liberal and democratic. However, it seems that the conditions for implementing even these much less ambitious missions are often missing, as in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, Syria, Libya and several other African countries.

A reviewer of an early draft of this article raised an important question, asking:

> Is it really the case that the US prioritizes secularism all the way down to policy preferences? What about the strong alliances with the most traditionally 'Islamic' countries in the region such as Saudi Arabia? Is this about normative factors or interest? Hafiz Assad is secular but the US opposes him. Saddam Hussein was secular and the US deposed him after he was supported against Iran for eight years. It seems that foreign policy preferences are by far more malleable than it appears here.

In response, I fully acknowledge that when public diplomacy and other elements of US foreign policy (or for that matter, any country's foreign policy) do not line up, or even conflict in their normative content, they undermine each other. Thus, a study of foreign policy would have to examine the full range of policies and their interrelations. This article is limited to the examination of what public diplomacy should contain.

Working with Islam to address Islam

We have now seen that the three major elements of the United States' normative appeal to Muslim nations face inherent major difficulties. The United States advocates separation of religion and state, while the majority of Muslims seek a *greater* role for religion in their *public* life; the US characterization of the good life clashes with that of devout Muslims, and raises expectations that cannot be met; and the US promotion of liberal democracy disregards the absence of the foundations needed for such regimes to thrive in most Muslim-majority states and the fact that they cannot be externally imposed or introduced via long-distance social engineering.

To form a sounder approach, one must acknowledge an observation that has often been overlooked or obscured: that there are two fundamentally different interpretations of Islam, *both* of which are supported by a close reading of the Qur'an and major texts.[41]

On the one hand, Islam has been characterized as a peaceful religion that has been distorted by malicious radicals. On 17 September 2001, less than a week after the World Trade Center collapsed, President George W. Bush declared: 'The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That's not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace.' That same year, Bush also said: 'The Islam that we know is a faith devoted to the worship of one God, as revealed through The Holy Qur'an. It teaches the value and the importance of charity, mercy, and peace.'[42] President Barack Obama stated that: 'We are at war with people who have perverted Islam.'[43] Others hold that terrorists and other violent extremists are not truly Muslims, as witnessed by support for the 'You ain't no Muslim, bruv' social media campaign in Great Britain that was praised by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron.[44]

In contrast, others in the West view Islam as an inherently violent religion. This view has proved particularly popular among Republican presidential candidates, such as Donald Trump, who called for a temporary ban on Muslims entering the United States because of the supposed security risk. Mike Huckabee, a former governor of Arkansas and twice Republican presidential candidate, said: 'The Muslims will go to the mosque, and they will have their day of prayer, and they come out of there like uncorked animals—throwing rocks and burning cars.'[45] Sam Harris, a 'New Atheist' who is critical of religion in general, reserves special scorn for Islam, which he views as particularly belligerent: 'Islam, more than any other religion human beings have devised, has all the makings of a thoroughgoing cult of death.'[46] Prominent antitheist Christopher Hitchens stated:

> All religions claim to be revealed truth; they are all founded by divine revelations, but Islam rather dangerously says, 'Ours is the last and final one. There can't be any more after this. This is God's last word.' That is straightaway a temptation to violence and intolerance and if you will note, it's a temptation they seem quite willing to fall for.[47]

Ex-Muslim Ayaan Hirsi Ali has argued that terrorists who claim to kill in the name of Islam ought to be taken at their word, writing:

> The view that the ideology of radical Islam is rooted in Islamic scripture understands fully

[41] See Etzioni, *Security first*, specifically Part III, 'The true fault line: warriors vs. preachers'.

[42] Both quotes from 'Backgrounder: the President's quotes on Islam', The White House, http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/ramadan/islam.html.

[43] 'Obama: "ugly lie" that West is at war with Islam', Voice of America, 19 Feb. 2015, http://www.voanews.com/content/president-obama-to-conclude-anti-extremist-summit/2650187.html.

[44] Damien Gayle, 'David Cameron praises "You ain't no Muslim, bruv" remark', *Guardian*, 7 Dec. 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/dec/07/david-cameron-praises-you-aint-no-muslim-bruv-remark.

[45] Nick Wing, 'Mike Huckabee: Muslims depart mosques like "uncorked animals", throwing rocks, burning cars', *Huffington Post*, 8 Aug. 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/08/mike-huckabee-muslims_n_3725678.html.

[46] Sam Harris, *The end of faith: religion, terror, and the future of reason* (New York: Norton, 2005), p. 123.

[47] Christopher Hitchens vs David Wolpe, 'The great God debate', Forum Network, 23 March 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iP9xNYCr5Js.

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the cause of terrorism; it takes religious arguments seriously, and does not view them as a mere smokescreen for underlying 'real' motivations, such as socio-economic grievances.[48]

These are the texts on which violent Islam draws.

Our extensive study[49] shows that *both* views ignore the fact that the Qur'an and *hadith*—like Christian and Jewish texts—contain passages that justify violence and others that reject it. Both are part of Islam. The Qur'an does include an exhortation to 'Slay the idolaters wherever you find them' (Q 9:5), and says: 'I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Therefore strike off their heads and strike off every fingertip of them' (Q 8:12). In the *hadith*, we may read: 'I have been commanded to fight against people so long as they do not declare that there is no god but Allah' (Sahih Muslim 1.9.30) and 'Killing unbelievers is a small matter to us' (Tabari 9:69). Observers of such exhortations may be called warriors;[50] 'jihadists' seems closer to the common parlance.

One finds in the same texts: 'And do not take any human being's life—that God willed to be sacred—other than in [the pursuit of] justice' (Q 17:33); and again: 'The taking of one innocent life is like taking all of Mankind … and the saving of one life is like saving all of Mankind' (Q 5:33). There are also exhortations to peace and compassion in the *hadith*: 'Someone urged the Messenger of God, "Call down a curse upon the idol-worshippers!" whereupon he said: "I have not been sent to curse. I have been sent as compassion"' (Muslim 6284). And again: 'A strong person is not the person who throws his adversaries to the ground. A strong person is the one who contains himself when he is angry' (Al-Muwatta 47.12). These are the texts on which non-violent, moderate Islam draws. It should be noted here that the opposite of our definition of 'moderate' Islam is not necessarily 'conservative' or even 'fundamentalist' Islam, but specifically violent Islam. Thus, the objective should not be to try to rebut entire branches or schools of Islam, but rather specifically to counter violent teachings. This is significant because most of the moderates we discuss below are still illiberal; that is, they abhor violence but do not necessarily embrace human rights, in particular women's rights and free speech. And when they state that they favour 'democracy', they use the term rather differently from how Americans use it; for instance, one Tunisian leader explained that he favoured democracy because it provides full employment.

A very telling example of the two iterations of Islam is the two views of 'jihad', a term which literally means 'struggle'. It is interpreted by those who view Islam as legitimating violence as a holy war to convert or kill all infidels.[51] In sharp

[48] Ayaan Hirsi Ali, 'Islam is a religion of violence', *Foreign Policy*, 9 Nov. 2015, http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/09/islam-is-a-religion-of-violence-ayaan-hirsi-ali-debate-islamic-state/.

[49] Amitai Etzioni, *Security first*.

[50] Khaled Abou El Fadl identifies the schism within Islam as one between 'moderates' and 'puritans'. This schema overlaps significantly with ours, but although El Fadl primarily identifies 'puritans' as Wahhabists and Salafists, his criteria for delineation are the scope of application of religious texts that a particular version of Islam advocates, and the role of scholarly interpretation. See Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The great theft: wrestling Islam from the extremists* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2005).

[51] A discussion of the lack of causal links between religiosity and violence is well beyond the scope of this article. Jocelyne Cesari has examined the supposed exceptionalism of religiously motivated violence and demon-

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contrast, for moderate Islam 'jihad' is a spiritual struggle in the search for self-improvement. In *A metahistory of the clash of civilisations*, Arshin Adib-Moghaddam systematically dismantles what he calls the 'clash regime', which perpetuates binary oppositions such as barbarian/civilized, Islam/Christianity and West/Islam.[52] Significantly, Adib-Moghaddam notes that the advent of literalist Islam did not occur until after the siege of Baghdad by the Mongols in the thirteenth century; political Islam in this regard was born in the context of existential crisis and external pressure.

This distinction between jihadists and moderate interpreters of Islam suggests that the most effective way to counter ISIS or other groups that draw inspiration from violent interpretations of Islam is not through secularism, the American version of the good life or even liberal democracy, but rather through appeals based on moderate Islam. Simply put, Thomas Jefferson or John Locke will gain little purchase among Muslims susceptible to the teachings of violent Islam; however, a dialogue could take as its point of departure the exhortations of clerics such as Ali Sistani, the spiritual leader of Iraq's Shi'i Muslims; Al-Azhar's Grand Mufti Shawqi Allam, the highest religious authority in Egypt; the Arab League; the International Union of Muslim Scholars; and Mehmet Görmez, Turkey's most senior cleric.[53]

Speaking to Muslims about universal women's rights will be less persuasive than pointing out that the Prophet Muhammad's views on gender were rather egalitarian for his time, and that his wives were influential in political and military matters.[54] The key point is that the United States must learn to communicate with the Muslim world using Islamic terms and ideas, rather than relying on liberal, western ones. (This echoes a broader critique levelled by Hamid Dabashi in *Can non-Europeans think?*, which explores the way in which the 'ethnographic gaze' marginalizes philosophies and 'thinkers' operating outside the 'European philosophical pedigree'.[55])

The response might be made that jihadists are unlikely to be persuaded by appeals based on non-violent, moderate interpretations of Muslim texts. This may well be true. At the same time, those who already denounce violence are hardly in need of such an appeal. The focus of efforts to engage in dialogue with Muslims should be those in the middle, who are not yet committed to either side—what might be called the swing vote; and, as we shall see below, they are a very large group. If they were to join the ranks of those who are already committed moderates,

strated that the most extreme cases of religious violence since the inception of the nation-state are attributable to the politicization of religion initiated by 'secular' state actors. See Jocelyne Cesari, 'Religion and politics: what does God have to do with it?', *Religions* 6: 4, 2015, pp. 1330–44.

[52] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *A metahistory of the clash of civilisations: us and them beyond orientalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). Tariq Ramadan has also explored the historical context in which a polarized understanding of the world arose in Islam. See Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[53] Center for Research on Globalization, 'Muslim leaders worldwide condemn ISIS', 24 Aug. 2014, http://www.globalresearch.ca/muslim-leaders-worldwide-condemn-isis/5397364.

[54] Fatima Mernissi, *The veil and the male elite: a feminist interpretation of women's rights in Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

[55] Hamid Dabashi, *Can non-Europeans think?* (London: Zed, 2015).

jihadists would become an isolated minority and find it much more difficult to increase their ranks and replace those they lose to civil war and terrorism.

A full discussion of the nature of moral dialogues is beyond the scope of this article,[56] but several characteristics important for our purposes here should be highlighted. First, moral dialogues differ both from deliberations—which attempt to isolate 'reason' from 'passion'—and from culture wars, which turn differences into total opposition. Second, moral dialogues are necessarily normative, and are not mere discussions of fact or logic; they often appeal to some overarching value shared by all participants.

The swing vote needs to be addressed using the language of non-violent interpretations of Islam, rather than in terms of appeals based on liberal democracy, because many who support moderation do not necessarily support human rights, especially in cases where the latter come into conflict with shari'a law. They are thus properly referred to as 'illiberal moderates'. Evidence indicates that this group comprises the majority of Muslims worldwide. Pew polling found that in 2015, majorities in most Muslim countries thought suicide bombing was rarely or never justified: in both Iraq and Indonesia, over 90 per cent responded thus, as did at least 80 per cent in Tunisia, Jordan and Pakistan. Even in Afghanistan, 58 per cent of respondents said suicide bombing was rarely or never justified.[57] As noted above, significant majorities in these same countries supported making shari'a law official; it follows that the vast majority of moderates (in the sense of opposing violence) are also illiberal. For example, the Pew Research Center found that, across all Muslim countries, fewer than 10 per cent of Muslims think that homosexuality is morally acceptable, including only 1 per cent of respondents in such relatively liberal Muslim countries as Senegal and Indonesia.[58] Similarly, in many Muslim countries, such as Pakistan, Iraq, Malaysia and a handful of sub-Saharan African states, a higher percentage of respondents thought polygamy was morally acceptable than thought divorce was morally acceptable.[59]

Dedicated proponents of secularism fail to recognize granularity on the spectrum of religious involvement in politics. There are numerous groups who want Islam to play a greater role in public life, but do not favour coercive enforcement of religion. One would hardly fear a caliphate headed by moderate Quakers or Reform Jews; neither should one be troubled by an Islamic state that followed one of the most oft-quoted lines from the Qur'an: 'There should be no compulsion in religion' (Q 2:256).

[56] For more extensive discussion, see Amitai Etzioni, *The new golden rule: community and morality in a democratic society* (New York: Basic Books, 1998); 'Transnational moral dialogues', *Society* 43: 3, 2006, pp. 45–9; 'Deliberations, culture wars, and moral dialogues', *The Good Society* 7: 1, 1997, pp. 34–8. Thomas Risse has explored arguing and truth-seeking as communicative action in International Relations (IR), and suggests that the preconditions for 'argumentative rationality' are more common in IR than is usually assumed. See Thomas Risse, 'Let's argue! Communicative action in world politics', *International Organization* 54: 1, 2000, pp. 1–39; 'Global governance and communicative action', *Government and Opposition* 39: 2, 2004, pp. 288–313.

[57] Lipka, 'Muslims and Islam'.

[58] Pew Research Center, 'The world's Muslims: religion, politics and society', ch. 3, 'Morality', Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 30 April 2013, http://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-morality/.

[59] Pew Research Center, 'The world's Muslims'.

This strategic position is similar to the one adopted by the United States during the Cold War. John Esposito observes that countering communism was premised on the thesis that the most effective way to counter violent socialism—communism—was to draw on the values of moderate socialism, on social democratic values, rather than those of groups at the opposite end of the normative spectrum, i.e. the conservatives.[60]

Which messenger?

Two issues present themselves when deliberating how best to promote the normative positions that seem most effective in countering those of ISIS and other terrorist groups and in pursuing dialogue with the Muslim world. One concerns the question of which agencies or organizations would be most effective in promoting the normative message. The second concerns how to ensure that it is disseminated on the necessary scale.

Regarding the first issue, the State Department and other US government agencies are not well suited to promoting moderate Islam. In part this is because the core values of the United States—discussed above—are centred on secularism in the public realm, capitalism and liberal democracy. In part it is due to the unfavourable reputation the US government acquired in large parts of the Muslim world as a result of actions by the CIA (including the overthrow of the government of Iran in 1953, torture, extraordinary renditions, etc.), bombing and drone strikes that cause civilian casualties, support of Israel and other factors. A 2015 Pew survey found that 'unfavourable' opinions of the United States were higher in Muslim countries than almost anywhere else in the world. The country with the most negative view of the US was Jordan, where 83 per cent of respondents reported an unfavourable opinion. Large majorities in several other Muslim-majority countries also had unfavourable views of the US, including 62 per cent in Pakistan, 70 per cent in Palestine and 60 per cent in Lebanon; even in Turkey, a NATO ally, 58 per cent of respondents had unfavourable views of the US, compared to only 29 per cent with positive views.[61] An independent review of the US government's counter-messaging against ISIS, commissioned by the White House, found that State Department officials, and the civilians they train, have little credibility.[62]

American government agencies are particularly ill suited to the position the United States needs to embrace according to the analysis advanced above: namely, to promote moderate interpretations of Islam in order to curb the appeal of violent ones. Liberals are likely to be troubled by such a project because they tend to be secularist. Conservatives are likely to be troubled by it because they would rather promote Judaeo-Christian values than Muslim ones. Both believe in separation

[60] John Esposito, 'It's the policy, stupid: political Islam and US foreign policy', *Harvard International Review* blog, 2 May 2007, http://hir.harvard.edu/its-the-policy-stupid/.

[61] Richard Wike, Bruce Stokes and Jacob Poushter, 'Global publics back US on fighting, but are critical of post-9/11 torture', Pew Research Center, 23 June 2015, http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2015/06/Balance-of-Power-Report-FINAL-June-23-2015.pdf.

[62] Greg Miller, 'Panel casts doubt on US propaganda efforts against ISIS', *Washington Post*, 2 Dec. 2015.

of state and church (albeit for different reasons, and with different views of what this entails). It is hard to imagine a Congress that would tolerate the federal government seriously promoting any kind of religion, which is precisely what this article advocates.

Such a government project also faces legal challenges. An in-house USAID rule entitled 'Participation by religious organizations in USAID' stipulates that USAID funding cannot be used for activities that are 'inherently religious', though the Secretary of State can waive the rule on a case-by-case basis.[63] USAID lawyers continue to reject proposals that involve even modest engagement with moderate Islam. For example, they blocked a proposal in 2006 to translate Islamic writings condemning suicide into Uzbek and Kyrgyz in order to counter the growing influence of Hizb ut-Tahrir, a radical Islamist group.[64] USAID has refused to spend aid dollars on religious education projects on the grounds that doing so would constitute a violation of the First Amendment's establishment clause.[65] William McCants reports that during his time as an adviser to the State Department for countering violent extremism, a small Muslim NGO was requesting funding for a proposal to compile Islamic scriptures that promoted tolerance and use them to promote pluralism. The programme was rejected by the State Department's lawyers.[66] Thomas Farr of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs writes: 'Unfortunately, despite the outpouring of scholarship since 2001, the religion-avoidance syndrome is still dominant at the Department of State.'[67] And yet the State Department is the main agency entrusted with formulating and promoting America's normative messages to the Muslim world. Its attempts thus far at 'counter-messaging' have been described as being in a state of 'disarray'.[68] Even Alberto Fernandez, the coordinator of the State Department's former Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, has admitted: 'We don't have a counter-narrative … What we have is half a message: "Don't do this." But we lack the "do this instead." That's not very exciting.'[69]

Lisa Monaco, a Homeland Security Advisor to the President, has acknowledged that: 'We first have to recognize that the US government is not going to be the best messenger' and that the US should instead be 'amplifying moderate, credible voices in the region'.[70] The concept of promoting respected, moderate, non-violent voices within the Muslim world has been recognized by some top-level

[63] United States Agency for International Development, 'USAID "rule" for participation by religious organizations', https://www.usaid.gov/faith-based-and-community-initiatives/usaid-rule-participation.
[64] Colum Lynch, 'In fighting radical Islam, tricky course for US aid', *Washington Post*, 30 July 2009.
[65] Lynch, 'In fighting radical Islam'.
[66] William McCants, 'Islamic scripture is not the problem', *Foreign Affairs* 94: 4, 2015, pp. 46–52.
[67] Thomas Farr, 'The trouble with American foreign policy and Islam', *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 9: 2, June 2011, pp. 65–73.
[68] Greg Miller and Scott Higham, 'In a propaganda war against ISIS, the US tried to play by the enemy's rules', *Washington Post*, 8 May 2015.
[69] Simon Cottee, 'Why it's so hard to stop ISIS propaganda', *The Atlantic*, 2 March 2015, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/03/why-its-so-hard-to-stop--propaganda/386216/.
[70] Lisa O. Monaco on homeland security and counterterrorism, Council on Foreign Relations, 7 March 2016, audio and transcript, http://www.cfr.org/homeland-security/lisa-o-monaco-homeland-security-counterterrorism/p37621?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+issue%2Fdefensehomeland_security+%28CFR.org+-+Issues+-+Defense+and+Security%29&utm_content=Google+Feedfetcher.

American officials. For instance, Deputy Secretary of State Anthony Blinken assured an audience in February 2016 that the State Department's Global Engagement Center (the successor to the short-lived Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications) would be working with digital communication hubs 'to tackle propaganda and recruitment efforts head on by empowering independent, positive voices from the region—voices that represent the overwhelming majority of Muslims in the world'.[71] However, the scale of these endeavours is very small. As one official related privately: 'We spend less on these projects than the military spends on marching bands.' Moreover, even those projects dedicated to promote moderate—i.e. non-violent—Muslim voices keep reverting to the promotion of liberal values. Thus, the State Department's Office of Religion and Global Affairs begins with the innovative goal of engaging religious communities and leaders in its activities, but then retreats into familiar tropes. The official 'US Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement' seeks to engage religious leaders—in the 'advancement of universal human rights' and 'promoting core US values'.[72]

Much more suitable agents are indigenous NGOs and civil society bodies in Muslim countries that embrace moderate Islam. These are found, for instance, in Morocco, Jordan and Indonesia (even as the influence of violent interpretations of Islam are growing in those same countries). Turkish authorities prepare sermons (generally with moderate messages) that clerics use for preaching on Fridays. However, these are available only in Turkish. A Muslim publishing house or other organization could translate these sermons into the many languages used in the Muslim world and make them widely available via the internet. The same holds for moderate books, articles and various social media products. Abdurrahman Wahid, former President of Indonesia and leader of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)—the world's largest independent Islamic organization, with over 50 million members—along with Syafii Maarif, former chairman of Muhamaddiyah (Indonesia's second largest Islamic organization, with 30 million members), co-founded the International Institute of Qur'anic Studies (IIQS). This body seeks to bring about a sort of 'Reformation' within Islam and promote a renaissance of Islamic pluralism and tolerance. Its mission deserves much attention. The IIQS's strategic plan states that: 'Any attempt to "reform" Islam that is overtly or covertly hostile to religion is not only misguided, but doomed to failure … the only realistic hope of liberating Islam from the prison of dogma and politics lies in producing a broad-based spiritual revitalization of Islam itself.'[73] Another line of action is to support associations of Muslim clergy, public intellectuals and leaders who have moderate views, to help them conduct regular meetings (both online and face-to-face), build bonds among moderates and attract more members.

[71] Anthony J. Blinken, 'New frameworks for countering terrorism and violent extremism', remarks at the Brookings Institution, 16 Feb. 2016, http://www.state.gov/s/d/2016d/252547.htm.

[72] US Department of State, 'US strategy on religious leader and faith community engagement', http://www.state.gov/s/rga/strategy/.

[73] International Institute of Qur'anic Studies, *International Institute of Qur'anic Studies: birth of a movement* (Jakarta, Cairo, Winston-Salem, Leiden and Magalang: IIQS/LibForAll Foundation, 2013), http://www.iiqs.org/publications/IIQS-SP_Executive-Summary.pdf.

If one accepts the thesis that ISIS and other such groups cannot be defeated on the battlefield alone and must be countered in the normative realm also, it follows that the resources available to this drive must be greatly increased.

The United States could directly finance these groups; indeed, some Islamic organizations have demonstrated a willingness to work with western governments and institutions. For example, NU receives funding from the Austrian Ministry of the Interior for a partnership with the University of Vienna to research extremism and provide a counter-narrative.[74] In 2015 it launched a global campaign against ISIS and opened a 'prevention center' in Indonesia that will give Arabic-speaking students theological guidance to counter jihadist ideology.[75]

However, the credibility of many of these groups is likely to be lost if they receive significant support from the US government. The United States could attempt to conceal its involvement by funding these organizations covertly, as it did in countering communism during the Cold War. Those efforts were quite successful; but once the source of funds was revealed, those involved felt betrayed, and the campaign raised many ethical and legal issues.[76] Another possibility is to strongly encourage wealthy Muslim governments—those of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, for example—to support the promotion of moderate Islam. For many years the Saudi government financed the curriculums and salaries of teachers in many Muslim countries in support of a rigid interpretation of Islam, but has discovered that this support has driven many young Muslims to embrace jihadist positions. Although the Saudi government continues to support Wahhabism, it now insists that those who have carried out violence are misguided and have both deviated from Wahhabism and insulted the King by refusing his generosity and kindness. Perhaps the Saudi government could be persuaded to support a campaign to promote moderate Islam.

In conclusion

ISIS has crafted a compelling narrative that has lured Muslim recruits from all over the world. ISIS may be defeated militarily, but so long as the normative positions that it espouses remain relevant, other groups are likely to draw on them to support attacks on free societies, those societies' allies and moderate Muslims. Thus far, US 'counter-messaging' has been ineffective; it has failed to articulate a normative position that is responsive to the deeply held beliefs of most of the world's Muslims. The United States strongly holds that religion should be a private affair; it continually seeks to ally itself with secular forces in the Muslim

[74] Sujadi Siswo, 'Researchers, scholars team up for theological battle against Islamic State', *Channel NewsAsia*, 28 March 2016, http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/researchers-scholars-team/2641368.html.

[75] Joe Cochrane, 'From Indonesia, a Muslim challenge to the ideology of the Islamic State', *New York Times*, 26 Nov. 2015.

[76] For more discussion of the US government's activities and the current parallels, see Angel Rabasa, Cheryl Benard, Lowell H. Schwartz and Peter Sickle, *Building moderate Muslim networks* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007). For a critical analysis of the ethical issues raised by this Cold War strategy, see Karen M. Paget, *Patriotic betrayal: the inside story of the CIA's secret campaign to enroll American students in the crusade against communism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

world and to promote them. These often turn out to be the weakest groups because data show that the overwhelming majority of Muslims seek more, not less, religion in public life. The United States is promoting capitalism and hence in effect the affluent way of life associated with it. To many devout Muslims, it seems that Americans worship consumer goods instead of God, and others are further alienated to the point that they cannot find a job or are poorly paid and thus cannot gain even a piece of the life portrayed on American television and film screens. Promising them economic development or a 'Marshall Fund for the Middle East', which cannot be delivered, just adds to their frustration. Promoting liberal democracy ignores the evidence that many of the target nations have not yet developed the sociological foundations necessary for such a regime to take hold. The United States—whether in dealing with ISIS or other such groups, or in addressing the much larger Muslim world—needs to appeal to different values from those associated with secularism, capitalism and democracy. The answer to how this could be done may be found in the fact that there are basically two different iterations of Islam. One legitimates violence, for instance in the call to kill all infidels. The other abhors violence and holds, for instance, that there ought to be no compulsion in religion. A very large part of the Muslim world, as the data show, subscribes to the moderate iterations of Islam. However, many of these do not accept secularism or liberalism. Hence, they are best called 'illiberal moderates'. The US can appeal to these illiberal moderates in terms of rejecting terrorism and violence, but is unlikely to persuade them to embrace other values that Americans hold dear. It is on this point that the argument presented here differs most sharply from those who seek to encourage liberal Muslims; certainly, liberals are to be favoured, but the most important distinction for public diplomacy in the foreseeable future is between moderate Muslims and violent ones, and moderation should not be equated with liberalism.

For fairly obvious reasons, official US agencies are not well suited to promote moderate Islam as the best antidote to violent Islam. Rather, the best carriers of this message are to be found in the Muslim world; they are already in place, but their reach must be significantly expanded. And their message of moderation must not be undermined by seeking to graft onto it values other than doing good without using force.