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Chapter 4 The War Against Nasser and Mossadegh

In the early 1950s, two nationalist leaders emerged in two of the most powerful countries of the Middle East, Egypt and Iran. In Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser's Free Officers ousted that country's dissolute king and threatened to spark revolution in Saudi Arabia, the heart of the world's energy supply. In Iran, a freely elected democrat and socialist-inclined leader named Mohammed Mossadegh successfully challenged the ruling shah of Iran, forced him to flee, and asserted his country's right to take over the oil industry from Britain's Anglo-Persian Oil Company.

In both cases Great Britain, the United States, and their intelligence agencies went into action, overthrowing Mossadegh and trying but failing to do the same to Nasser, and in both cases, MI6 and the CIA used the Islamic right as a cat's-paw. In Egypt, they used the Muslim Brotherhood, and in Iran they mobilized a group of 'ayatollahs that included the ideological godfather of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Perhaps the greatest twin tragedies, or lost opportunities, for the United States in the Middle East in the past half century are the American failures to embrace Gamal Abdel Nasser and Mohammed Mossadegh when they emerged, in the 1950s, as leaders of their people's aspirations. That error created a residue of resentment, bitterness, and anger in the Middle East, feeding widespread, lingering anti-Americanism to this day and even providing fuel for Al Qaeda's recruiters. Yet it was a folly compounded by yet another massive error: the U.S. decision to support Saudi Arabia as the counter pole to Arab and Persian nationalism, and to tie itself to a worldwide network of Islamists sponsored by the Saudis. It was a decision whose consequences led, indirectly, to the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini's theocracy, the destruction of Afghanistan, and Osama bin Laden's terrorist international.

The Brotherhood Against Nasser

From 1954, when Nasser consolidated power over his rivals, until 1970, when he died, Nasser garnered unparalleled, even legendary, support in Egypt, and throughout the Arab world. Andre Malraux, the French writer, said, of Nasser: "He will enter history as representative of Egypt, the same as Napoleon of France."¹ William R. Polk, an official at the National Security Council in the 1960s, said: "He was the John Kennedy of the Arab world."² Five million people turned out for his funeral, and that doesn't count the tens of millions of Arabs who mourned privately, "the ones who wept in coffeehouses, at home, alone, in groups, silently, loudly, through prayer, in cars in faraway California, or who suffered the pain of his death in frozen numbness."³ Yet over and over, in the 1950s and again in the 1960s, the United States stiff-armed Nasser, and worse. Behind the scenes, the CIA schemed to topple him.

"We were trying to overthrow Nasser," says Ed Kane, a CIA operations officer who was stationed in Cairo in the late 1950s and early 1960s. "The Agency was involved in a covert operation—a very inept one, I might add—relying on members of the ancien regime, who had absolutely no power. We were attempting to find elements who could overthrow him, mostly figures tied to the old regime—landowners, industrialists, and other old enemies of Nasser's. It was a futile project."⁴

Half a century ago, Nasser symbolized Arab revolution, self-determination, and independence. The seizure of power by the Free Officers in Egypt came during an era when the entire Arab world, from Morocco to Iraq, was locked in the grip of a political ice age. Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia were French colonies; Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Yemen were British colonies. Iraq, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia were kingdoms ruled by monarchies installed by London. And Egypt, under the wobbly King Farouq, was the political and economic center of the

Arab world. By taking power in Egypt, Nasser electrified the political class in the Arab world, inspiring a host of would-be imitators, liberation-minded political parties, and army revolutionists. From 1954 onward, through agents, political support, and the powerful Voice of the Arabs radio in Cairo, and by virtue of his charismatic appeal, Nasser led the independence movement in the Arab Middle East. From 1956 to 1958, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq were rocked by rebellions, Iraq's king fell, and Syria united with Egypt in Nasser's United Arab Republic, a short-lived but exciting experiment in unifying the Arab world. The Algerian revolution drew moral and material support from Cairo, before winning independence in 1962, the same year that Yemen underwent a Nasser-inspired revolt, triggering a proxy war pitting Saudi Arabia against Egypt. Even as late as 1969, a year before Nasser's death, Libya's king was overthrown and Sudan's right-wing regime eliminated by military leaders loyal to Nasser.

In the Manichean, with-us-or-against-us world of the Cold War, Nasser was loathed and demonized by London, Washington, and Tel Aviv. Around the world, from Guatemala to the Congo to Indonesia—and in Iran—the CIA was busy getting rid of leaders not because they were communists, but because their independent streak made them untrustworthy interlocutors in the war between the superpowers. Nasser was no exception.

Unlike other leaders in Latin America or Africa, however, Nasser, with his revolutionary outlook, threatened the very heart of America's post-World War II strategy: the vast oil fields of Saudi Arabia. Not only was Egypt a potential military rival to Saudi Arabia, not only did Cairo clash with Riyadh in a shooting war in Yemen, not only did Nasser inspire Arabs in Saudi Arabia with republican ideals, but the Egyptian leader even won over some of Saudi Arabia's royal family, who, led by Prince Talal, formed the so-called "Free Princes," defected to Egypt, and demanded the establishment of a republic in Arabia.

As the United States built its network of alliances in the Middle East, relying more and more on non-Arab states, including Turkey, Iran, and Israel, there developed an "Arab cold war," with Egypt at one end and Saudi Arabia at the other. Superficially, it seemed as if the struggle within the Arab world pitted Soviet-leaning Arab countries against American-allied ones, but in fact the Soviet Union had no true allies and few friends in the region. The real dynamic that played out between 1954 and 1970 occurred between competing visions of the future of the Middle East. On one hand, there was Nasser's secular, modernizing, industrial Arab world of independent but cooperative Arab republics. On the other was Saudi Arabia's semi-feudal array of monarchies, with their natural resources put at the West's disposal, in which the royal families' ace-in-the-hole was the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic right.

A contingent of America's Arabists rejected the strategy of isolating Nasser, and some even saw him as the Arab world's savior. "In the beginning Nasser had some strong support from the Agency and from the embassy," says Kane, referring to the period from 1952 to 1954.⁵ According to one widely cited account, by Miles Copeland in *The Game of Nations*, the CIA even encouraged the Free Officers in their revolution, after first trying to get King Farouq to modernize Egypt. The legendary Kermit ("Kim") Roosevelt, the man who would coordinate the 1953 CIA coup that restored the shah of Iran to his throne, secretly visited Egypt in 1952:

His mission, specifically, was first to attempt to organize a "peaceful revolution" in Egypt wherein King Farouq himself would supervise the liquidation of the old and its replacement by the new, thereby defusing the revolutionary forces which CIA agents had identified as much as two years earlier.⁶

But, according to Copeland, Farouq was too "bird-brained"⁷ and corrupt to respond, preferring to engage in orgies and troll Cairo's Red Light district in sunglasses than to take responsibility for Egypt. Kim Roosevelt thus

. . . agreed to meet the officers whom the CIA had spotted as likely leaders of the secret military society known to be plotting a coup. This he did in March 1952, four months before Nasser's coup. . . . There were three such meetings, the third attended by one of Nasser's most trusted lieutenants.⁸

Roosevelt returned to Washington to convince the U.S. government that it must accept the removal of Farouq.

There is no way to corroborate Copeland's account. Declassified archives don't provide any help, and no one else has stepped forward to endorse Copeland's specific assertions. Yet the United States initially enjoyed generally good relations with the new Egyptian government. In his excellent book, *Nasser's Blessed Movement*, Joel Gordon reports that declassified "records do substantiate charges of close links between the U.S. embassy in Cairo and the new regime." The British, on the other hand, though resigned to following the U.S. lead, seethed with anger at Washington, fearing that Nasser's rise to power threatened the Suez Canal, its bases, and its path to India.⁹

But more was at stake than the remnants of the British Empire. The emergence of Nasser was an existential threat to the oil kingdoms—to Saudi Arabia, to Iraq, and to the British-owned sheikhs in the Gulf. The British, and then the Anglo-Americans, opposed Nasser not because he was a communist, or because he was susceptible to communist influence; in fact, Nasser suppressed the Egyptian left and the various communist parties vigorously. In addition, the Egyptian communists were poorly organized and divided, with support primarily among the intelligentsia, and had no chance of taking power except as a minority stakeholder in a Wafd-led nationalist government. What was intolerable to London and Washington (and to Paris, too, until 1956) was that Nasser refused to be controlled, was adept at playing the superpowers off against each other, and inspired loyalty among Arabs outside of Egypt, including those sitting on top of the oil.

What especially worried London and Washington was the idea that Nasser might succeed in unifying Egypt and Saudi Arabia, thus creating a major Arab power. One of the ironies of the Arab world is that Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, which have historically been the centers of Arab learning and political movements, have no oil. On the other hand, except for Iraq and non-Arab Iran, the oil states—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar—have tiny populations and no intellectual tradition (except ultra-orthodox Islamic theology), and are ruled by royal kleptocracies whose legitimacy is nil and whose existence depends on outside military protection. Most Arabs are aware that both the monarchies themselves, and the artificial borders that demarcate their states, were designed by imperialists seeking to build fences around oil wells in the 1910s. From a strategic standpoint, the Arabs would gain much by marrying the sophistication and manpower of the urban Arab countries (including Iraq) with the oil wealth of the desert kingdoms. At the center of that idea lies Egypt, with its tens of millions of people, and Saudi Arabia, with 200 billion barrels of oil. Underlying the rhetoric of secular pan-Arabism is the reality that uniting Cairo and Riyadh would create a vastly important new Arab center of gravity with worldwide influence.

So, after its initial flirtation with Nasser, the United States—led by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his brother, CIA director Allen Dulles—lined up with London against Arab nationalism. British prime minister Anthony Eden, who had been violently anti-Nasser all along, considered a British-sponsored coup d'état in Cairo as early as 1953. The only political force in Egypt that could mount a challenge to Nasser—except for the army—was the Muslim Brotherhood, which had hundreds of thousands of followers. The Brotherhood also had the sympathy of some Egyptian officers, including Brigadier General Mohammed Naguib, a longtime Muslim Brotherhood fellow traveler who was a conservative member of Nasser's Free Officers movement. In 1952, after the officers' coup toppled the king, Naguib was named president and prime minister of Egypt, with Nasser as deputy prime minister. Behind the scenes, Nasser was the real power. "William Lakeland, the [U.S.] embassy's political officer, realized almost immediately that Naguib was only Nasser's front man," wrote Miles Copeland. "While the Egyptian public and the outside world were cheering Naguib, the embassy, through Lakeland, had begun to deal with Nasser as the one who really made the decisions."¹⁰ But Naguib, though less powerful than Nasser, had close ties to Hassan Ismail al-Hudaybi, the man who had succeeded Hassan al-Banna as the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. Ultimately, a power struggle between Nasser and Naguib would develop, and Naguib—with British support—would reach out to the Brotherhood as his chief ally.

Nasser's own early relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood was tricky and nuanced.¹¹ On taking power in 1952, the Free Officers were very careful not to alienate the Muslim Brothers. Several members of the officers' movement were members, and most of them, including Nasser, had extensive contacts with the organization going back to the 1940s. At the start the military junta faced a diverse coalition of opponents, including the Wafd and the left, the monarchists, the fascist Young Egypt party, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Nasser, who personally oversaw the military's delicate relationship with the Brotherhood, decided at first to co-opt and neutralize the group rather than confront it. When the new Egyptian regime banned political parties in 1953, it exempted the Brotherhood.

There was, however, little chance that Nasser and the Muslim Brotherhood would ever see eye to eye. The Brotherhood wanted an Islamic society, Nasser a secular one. Perhaps even more important, Nasser wanted reforms, including land reform and educational changes, that the Muslim Brotherhood bitterly opposed. In conversations with U.S. ambassador Jefferson Caffery—the same Caffery who recommended that the Brothers' Said Ramadan visit Princeton and the White House in 1953—Hudaybi, the Brotherhood's chieftain, said that he "would be glad to see several of the [Free Officers] 'eliminated.'" ¹² At around the same time, a senior British diplomat, Trefor Evans, the "oriental counselor" at the British embassy in Cairo, held at least one meeting with Hassan Ismail al-Hudaybi, the supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood—a meeting later cited as treason by Nasser when he cracked down on the organization. Both British and American officials maintained an ongoing relationship with the group.

Nasser's long-postponed showdown with the Muslim Brotherhood occurred in 1954. It coincided with rising British frustration with the Egyptian leader during U.K.-Egypt negotiations over the transfer of the Suez Canal and its bases to Egypt. While left-wing and Labour politicians in England seemed willing to make a deal with Nasser, the British right—led by unreconstructed imperialists such as Winston Churchill—was nearly apoplectic about the Egyptian upstart. From 1954 on, Anthony Eden, the British prime minister, was demanding Nasser's head. We are indebted to Stephen Dorril for the story of Eden's jihad against Nasser, which culminated in 1956. "MI6 had been considering a plan to assassinate President Nasser," according to Dorril, who adds that in *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, Nasser's adviser Mohammed Heikal published a copy of a telegram from CIA's James Eichelberger in London to CIA director Allen Dulles, citing discussions with MI6's George Young. "He talked openly of assassinating Nasser, instead of using a polite euphemism like 'liquidating.' He said his people had been in contact with suitable elements in Egypt and in the rest of the Arab world." Eichelberger—like Copeland, part of the CIA's shrinking pro-Nasser faction—leaked what Young said to Nasser!¹³ A month later, Eden ranted: "What's all this nonsense about isolating Nasser or 'neutralising' him, as you call it? I want him destroyed, can't you understand? I want him murdered.... And I don't give a damn if there's anarchy and chaos in Egypt."¹⁴

In the first months of 1954, the chaos nearly began, as the Muslim Brotherhood and Nasser went to war. It started in January, when Muslim Brotherhood thugs attacked pro-Nasser nationalist students at Cairo University. Anwar Sadat, the former Muslim Brotherhood member who had cast his lot with Nasser against his former organization, penned an article attacking groups that "traffic in religion." Two days later Nasser issued a decree outlawing the terrorist group, and he blasted the Brotherhood as a pawn of the British. The decree banning the organization said: "The revolution will never allow reactionary corruption to recur in the name of religion."¹⁵ Declassified records show that British intelligence was carefully reporting on Muslim Brotherhood activity, noting "rumors of clashes between Brothers and the police in the Delta and covert meetings held in Ismailia."¹⁶

According to Robert Baer, a former CIA covert operations specialist, the CIA also endorsed the idea of using the Muslim Brotherhood against Nasser. In *Sleeping with the Devil*, Baer describes the rough outlines of a top secret U.S. effort:

At the bottom of it all was this dirty little secret in Washington: The White House looked on the Brothers as a silent ally, a secret weapon against (what else?) communism. This

covert action started in the 1950s with the Dulles brothers—Alien at the CIA and John Foster at the State Department—when they approved Saudi Arabia's funding of Egypt's Brothers against Nasser. As far as Washington was concerned, Nasser was a communist. He'd nationalized Egypt's big-business industries, including the Suez Canal. The logic of the cold war led to a clear conclusion: If Allah agreed to fight on our side, fine. If Allah decided political assassination was permissible, that was fine, too, as long as no one talked about it in polite company.

Like any other truly effective covert action, this one was strictly off the books. There was no CIA finding, no memorandum notification to Congress. Not a penny came out of the Treasury to fund it. In other words, no record. All the White House had to do was give a wink and a nod to countries harboring the Muslim Brothers, like Saudi Arabia and Jordan.¹⁷

While both Britain and the United States were playing with fire, mobilizing assassins from the Muslim Brotherhood against Nasser, there is also evidence that the Brotherhood was cooperating with a violent, assassination-prone Islamist group from Iran, the so-called Devotees of Islam, one of whose founders was an Iranian ayatollah who worked with the CIA in toppling Mossadegh. Bernard Lewis, a former British intelligence officer and a leading Orientalist, noted that the Brothers' decision to engage in outright opposition to Nasser was tied, in part, to its connections to the Devotees. It was, reported Lewis, a visit to Cairo in 1954 by the leader of the Devotees of Islam that triggered the Muslim Brotherhood's 1954 uprising against Nasser:

The same combination of idealism and violence, of piety and terror, can be seen in the Persian organization known as the *Fidaiyan-i Islam*—the devotees of Islam, which, significantly, borrows a term used by the medieval emissaries of the Old Man of the Mountain. Though Shiites, they hold pan-Islamic opinions rather similar to those of the Egyptian brothers, with whom they have contacts. On March 7, 1951, one of their members shot and killed Persian Prime Minister General Razmara. It was a visit of the *Fidai* leader, Nawab Safavi, to Egypt in January, 1954, that touched off the first serious and open clash between the Brotherhood and [Nasser's] military regime.¹⁸

The 1954 Brotherhood-Devotees link reveals the extent to which, even in the 1950s, Islamic fundamentalism was truly international. It reached across national borders in the Arab world, it connected Arab fanatics with those in Pakistan, and it linked Sunni militants with Shi-ite ones in Iran and elsewhere. Even half a century later, it isn't clear whether the CIA understood the international scope and power of the forces they were dealing with. Did they understand that the Islamic right in Egypt, in Saudi Arabia, in Iran and elsewhere operated a shadowy, worldwide fraternity—or did they believe that they could pick and choose when and where to support the Islamic right, on a case-by-case basis? The fact is that by the 1950s the Islamists had created a transnational organism, whose existence appeared to elude the CIA for decades. Instead, American diplomats and CIA officials preferred to see Islamic activists only in relation to the country in which they were stationed.

During 1954, relations between Nasser and the Brothers grew more tense. Though now officially outlawed, the Brotherhood still maintained a powerful presence throughout the country. Nasser moved first against Naguib. In a prolonged struggle during February and March, Nasser marginalized Naguib, shunting him aside and deftly neutralizing the Muslim Brotherhood in the process. In April, Nasser brought to trial the first of several leading Brotherhood officials, and a final confrontation with the organization seemed inevitable. The Egyptian police began watching the organization's actions, even raiding its mosques and imposing controls on sermons by radical imams. In September, the Egyptian government stripped five Muslim Brotherhood officials of their citizenship while they were on a mission to Syria. Among them was Said Ramadan, the Brotherhood's chief ideologue. The five men were attending a conference in Damascus at which they organized Muslim Brotherhood members from Iraq, Jordan, and Sudan to denounce Nasser.¹⁹ Leading members of the Brotherhood, including Hudaybi, went into hiding.

Finally, on October 26, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood fired eight shots at Nasser. The facts surrounding the assassination attempt are somewhat murky, but in most accounts the shots

at Nasser were fired at point-blank range by a Brotherhood member who was immediately arrested. Was there a larger conspiracy? Were the British putting the Brothers up to killing Nasser? Certainly, the record shows, the idea wasn't beyond Eden.

During the mid-1950s, in actions that foreshadowed the attempts to kill Fidel Castro by John F. Kennedy's CIA, the British hatched innumerable schemes to murder the Egyptian leader, some of them harebrained. They funneled money into Egypt to bribe Nasser's doctor to poison him, concocted a plot to "inject lethal poison into some popular Egyptian Kropje chocolates" destined for him, created a James Bond-like "modified cigarette packet which fired a poisoned dart," and tried to "slip a poisoned pill into Nasser's coffee." (Copeland, who learned about the latter scheme, says that he joked with Nasser about it. "Turn your head, Gamal, and let me see if I can put this poison in your coffee.")²⁰ Yet all of this British skulduggery was not funny, and it gives credence to the notion that the British may have tried to use the Muslim Brotherhood's veteran assassins, too.

Reprisals against the Muslim Brotherhood were swift and deadly. More than a thousand Brothers were arrested; many were sentenced to long prison terms, and six were hanged. Assets of the organization were seized, and its offices and welfare centers taken over by government agencies. Naguib, with his credibility among the army fading and his Brotherhood allies scattered, was ousted from the government entirely in November, leading C. L. Sulzberger to describe him as "Kerensky with a fez" in the *New York Times*.²¹

To help round up the Muslim Brotherhood's leading lights, Nasser played a secret card, using a jujitsu-like maneuver against a clique of former Nazis who had taken roost in Egypt after World War II. During the war, many right-wing Islamists and Brotherhood activists—including Haj Amin al-Husseini, the mufti of Jerusalem, who had settled in Cairo—had intimate ties to the Nazis and to German intelligence. After the war, many former Nazis who escaped the Nuremberg trials and other dragnets fled to safe havens around the world, and Egypt in the ' 1940s was particularly welcoming. By then, the CIA and MI6 were fast recruiting former Nazis to the Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union. Working with Reinhard Gehlen, the former Nazi intelligence chief, the CIA and the U.S. army helped to set up the famous Gehlen Organization, the association of ex-Nazi spies that was used by James Critchfield of the CIA as the core of the West German intelligence system. Some of them, no doubt, infiltrated Egypt on behalf of either U.S. or British intelligence; others were simply migrating to what they hoped was a hospitable environment.

One of the ex-Nazis who ended up in Egypt was Franz Buensch, a German whose claim to fame was the publication of an anti-Semitic tract called *Sexual Habits of the Jews*, and it was Buensch that Nasser manipulated in order to ferret out Brotherhood plotters. According to Miles Copeland, Buensch proposed an outlandish scheme to use former Nazis to organize an international Islamic underground in conjunction with the Muslim Brotherhood. Nasser feigned interest in the gambit, then, says Copeland, had his security chief use it to round up Muslim Brotherhood members:

Buensch . . . did develop one project that quickly gained Egyptian interest: a plan to collect Nazi diehards from their various hiding places all over the world (Argentina, Brazil, Ireland, Spain, etc.) and give them Islamic names, join them to "underground assets" developed by Egypt during the Second World War, build a subversive intelligence org combining the best in German and Egyptian talent, and "put it at the disposal" of Gamal Abdel Nasser for his international war against communism and imperialism.

The plan was presented to Saad Afaq, the General Intelligence Agency officer then responsible for administration and surveillance of the Germans. Saad, whose genial manner covered one of the shrewdest brains in Egypt, affected great interest in the plan, but insisted that he must hear much more about these "underground assets." Buensch, who until then had been sulking at Egyptian indifference to his pet subject, began to feel that at last he was being appreciated and that perhaps he was on to something big. With Saad Afaq's encouragement, he produced all the information on the subject he could remember, then pumped other members of the German colony for what they remembered. The result was enough evidence to hang half the Moslem Brotherhood, plus enough leads to keep Egyptian security officers busy for the next two years establishing the extent of influence of the organization not only in Egypt but throughout the Arab world.²²

In 1954, Egypt and the United Kingdom had signed an agreement over the Suez Canal and British military basing rights. It was shortlived. In 1956, Great Britain, France, and Israel concocted a plot against Egypt aimed at toppling Nasser and seizing control of the Suez Canal—a conspiracy in which they enlisted the Muslim Brotherhood. When the gathering British-Egyptian showdown erupted in 1956, the organization had been largely dismantled and its members jailed, driven into exile, or forced underground in Egypt. But that didn't stop London from reaching out to its old allies. The story of Suez has been told countless times: how Nasser sought U.S. financial help to build the Aswan Dam and was rebuffed insultingly; how the United States refused to sell arms to Egypt; how the Soviet Union stepped in to supply aid and sell Czech arms to Nasser; how the British stonewalled negotiations about handing over the canal; and how London and Paris plotted with Israel to go to war. Eden's hatred for Nasser had reached fever pitch. Less well known, however, is the fact that as the plot unfolded, the British held secret powwows with the Muslim Brotherhood in Geneva. According to Dorril, two British spooks, Col. Neil McLean and Julian Amery, helped MI6 organize a clandestine anti-Nasser opposition in the south of France and in Switzerland. "They also went so far as to make contact in Geneva, where the MI6 head of station was Norman Darbyshire, with members of the Muslim Brotherhood, informing only MI6 of this demarche which they kept secret from the rest of the Suez Group [which was planning the military operation]. Amery forwarded various names to [Selwyn] Lloyd," the British foreign secretary.²³ The exact nature of MI6's contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe during this period is not known, but it may have ranged from organizing a secret assassination effort to assembling a secret government-in-exile to replace Nasser after the Suez war.

The Anglo-French plot that unfolded in 1956 reads like a nineteenth-century imperialist scheme. London and Paris arranged for Israel to launch an unprovoked war against Egypt. According to the conspiracy, the British and French would wait a decent interval, perhaps some days, and then intervene militarily to impose a truce on Egypt and Israel, meanwhile seizing the Suez Canal in the process. Nasser, they hoped, would fall—perhaps be overthrown. And the Muslim Brotherhood, though weakened, was waiting in the wings. In the end, President Eisenhower—fearing that the Soviet Union would reap untold rewards by capitalizing on the Anglo-French-Israeli aggression—joined with other nations to foil the plot. For a time, it seemed as if the United States had an opportunity once again to build a positive relationship with Nasser. Almost immediately, however, the opportunity was lost, and the Dulles brothers went back to the usual pattern of confronting both Nasser and Arab nationalism.

There were those State Department and CIA officials who were dismayed by the administration's reflexively anti-Nasser position. One of those was Copeland, who was an unabashed admirer of Nasser. Wrote Copeland, mixing praise with tongue-in-cheek scolding, "He is one of the most courageous, most incorruptible, most unprincipled, and in his way, most humanitarian national leaders I have ever met."²⁴ Yet as the 1950s wore on, Copeland became more and more a minority voice, as Washington Cold Warriors turned Nasser into the devil incarnate. The State Department's Arabists were "soft on Nasser," Copeland says, but "this tendency was more than offset by the opposition of the commercial community," especially the big U.S. oil companies and banks. As the tide turned against Copeland's view of Nasser, he was pulled aside by a joking CIA colleague visiting Cairo. "I think we've finally got you Nasser lovers on the run," he said. In 1954, Copeland notes ruefully, the CIA chief in Cairo cabled Washington that it should persuade Israel to emphasize "the Brotherhood's commendable capability to overthrow Nasser."²⁵

John Voll, a noted specialist on Islam, says matter-of-factly that CIA support for the Muslim Brotherhood during the Cold War was the right thing to do. "It was a smart intelligence vehicle," says Voll. "It was the only alternative to Nasser. The Communist Party in Egypt was a nonstarter. In terms of intelligence and policy planning we would have been stupid not to have had a relationship with them."²⁶

In retrospect, however, it is hard to think of anything more stupid. The United States didn't need an alternative to Nasser—it ought to have embraced him, and helped him undermine the Islamic

right. Instead, U.S. policy hardened against Nasser, joined the Saudi royals and their Islamic fundamentalist allies, and launched a decades-long effort to use political Islam as a cornerstone of American influence in the Middle East.

Moreover, the ideological rigidity of American foreign policy elites wasn't confined to Egypt. While the U.S. sought to undermine Nasser, it took on another regional nationalist, Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh of Iran. That effort would culminate in America's most famous CIA covert operation, the 1953 coup d'etat in Iran—and, as in Egypt, right-wing Islamists would play a prominent role.

The CIA and Khomeini's Godfather

It is one of the ironies in regard to both Nasser and Mossadegh that both men had a modicum of American support during their initial rise to power, until the exigencies of the Cold War turned U.S. policy decisively against them. At first, the United States tentatively supported the Iranian nationalists led by Mossadegh, partly out of Washington's early belief that liberal Third World nationalists might be able to modernize their nations while, at the same time, keeping them in the Western orbit. But the Eisenhower administration wasn't buying it. Its view was: You are either with us—that is, Third World leaders had to allow military bases, join alliances, and make economic concessions while implementing free-market policies—or you were against us. In a less polarized world Mossadegh, like Nasser, might have been able to reach a long-term accommodation with Washington.

As in Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood was mobilized against Nasser, Iran's forces of radical political Islam were cynically used against Mossadegh. The very same cleric-led, right-wing Islamists that toppled the shah in 1979 were paid by the CIA in 1953 to support him.

Mossadegh, an Iranian lawyer educated in Paris and Switzerland, was a complex figure who was a fixture in Iranian politics for decades before 1953, having served in Iran's parliament under the pre-Pahlavi Qajar dynasty in 1915 and as foreign minister in 1924. His association with the earlier line of Iranian kings set him at odds with Reza Pahlavi and his son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. In 1944, he was elected to parliament again, as a strong advocate of nationalizing Iran's oil industry, then under the grip of what is today British Petroleum. Mossadegh became chairman of the parliament's oil commission, and he created a coalition political movement, called the National Front. After the assassination of General Ali Razmara in 1951, the shah felt compelled to name Mossadegh to succeed Razmara as prime minister. But Mossadegh pushed through the nationalization of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC). It was a catastrophic blow to England; APOC, later Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and then British Petroleum, was the pride and joy of Britain's imperial assets, having gotten its start during World War I as the special project of Winston Churchill, who saw Persian oil as a source of fuel for the worldwide British navy. Mossadegh instantly became a hated man in London, and he clashed bitterly with the shah, whose own nationalist impulses were subordinate to his desire to maintain his throne and to have good relations with London and Washington. At first, many of Iran's most political ayatollahs participated in the National Front, but they left it and joined the CIA-sponsored campaign against Mossadegh, which resulted in a military coup d'etat in August 1953. The shah, who had fled the country, was restored to the Peacock Throne—and the nationalization of Iran's oil industry was annulled. In the process, the United States muscled in on Iranian oil: 40 percent of the share in the new consortium was given to five big American oil companies, and BP's share was reduced.

The story of the coup, run jointly by the CIA and MI6, has been told many times. Almost never reported, however, is the fact that the two intelligence agencies worked closely with Iran's clergy, the ulema, to weaken and ultimately to overthrow Mossadegh. A critical role was played by street mobs, bought and paid for by the CIA and mobilized by rabble rousers tied to the ulema, who demanded the ouster of the prime minister and the return of the shah. Ayatollah Seyyed Abolqassem Kashani, the chief representative of the Muslim Brotherhood in Iran and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's mentor and predecessor as Iran's leading Islamist cleric, was a central figure in the campaign.

According to former Iranian government officials, Khomeini himself, then no more than an obscure, middle-aged mullah and a follower of Kashani's, took part in the CIA-organized, pro-shah demonstrations against Mossadegh.²⁷ It is a supreme irony. Twenty-five years later, in 1978, that same Khomeini would once again lead a religious mob, this time to unseat the shah and create the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Ayatollah Abolqassem Kashani (1882-1961) was Khomeini's godfather. He was quintessentially political, having started his political career in the 1920s by serving in the Iranian parliament. In Iran, the clergy had a reputation for stopping at nothing to protect their status. In the 1920s, that meant that the establishment ulema would vociferously veto the creation of an Iranian republic. Reza Pahlavi, the military strongman who took control of Iran in the early 1920s, admired Kemal Ataturk, the secular Turkish republican leader, and wanted to declare Iran a republic on the Turkish model. But the mullahs, including Kashani, feared that a secular republic would fatally undermine their power, and so they demanded a monarchy. Princess Ashraf Pahlavi, the shah's twin sister, wrote in her memoirs about the clergy's resistance to republicanism: "My father favored a republic like that of Turkey, and he proposed this idea to the leading Shiite mullahs. But at a meeting in the holy city of Qom, the clergy—staunch supporters of the feudal system, the monarchy, and all tradition representing the status quo—told my father they would oppose any plan for a republic."²⁸ Not ready to challenge the powerful religious establishment, Reza abandoned the idea of a republic and proclaimed himself king. The young Kashani was one of the kingmakers.

Over the next twenty years, Kashani would have two enemies: the communists and the shah. Like Islamists everywhere, the ulema feared and hated the communists and their Tudeh Party, and used their religious muscle against the left. But for the mullahs, the real threat to their power in Iran came from the shah, who disdained the clergy as medieval-minded relics opposed to his efforts to modernize the country. Beginning in the 1930s, following the Ataturk model, the shah acted forcefully against the clergy. He brought the backward sharia courts under state control and nationalized some of the clergy's religious endowments, reducing the clergy's financial power and removing an important source of their income. He instituted a Western form of dress, banning Islamic garb, took control of marriage and divorce proceedings, and battled the Islamists over the emancipation of women. The shah ordered that public places be open to women¹ and outlawed the veil and the oppressive chador. In 1939, the shah banned the horrific practice of self-flagellation, a mutilating ritual practiced by some fundamentalist Shiites.²⁹ The measures were welcomed by Iran's modernists, but the clergy fumed. Often outflanked by the shah, Kashani quietly built up political power.

Just as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the late 1940s carried out acts of terrorism, in Iran, Kashani and his ilk fomented terrorist violence against the shah. In 1945, Kashani helped found the unofficial Iranian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Devotees of Islam, led by a radical mullah named Navab Safavi. A series of terrorist attacks by Kashani's movement included a 1949 assassination attempt against the shah, carried out by a member of the Islamist underground affiliated to a publication called *The Flag of Islam*. In 1950, one of the Devotees of Islam assassinated Abdul Hussein Hajir, the shah's minister of court, and in 1951 another Devotee murdered the prime minister, General Ali Razmara, just as Iran was renegotiating the rights to its oil resources with London. Razmara, said the shah in his memoirs, "had the agreement with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in his pocket when he died."³⁰ Most educated Iranians, from the shah on down, suspected the British of having ties to Iran's clergy and to the Islamist movement, if not to the actual acts of terrorism.

"The British wanted to keep up their empire, and the best way to do that was to divide and rule," says Fereydoun Hoveyda, who served as Iran's ambassador to the United Nations until the 1979 revolution, and whose brother, Amir Abbas Hoveyda, Iran's prime minister in the 1970s, was executed by the Khomeini regime. "The British were playing all sides. They were dealing with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the mullahs in Iran, but at the same time they were dealing with the army and the royal families." He says that the British saw the Islamists as just another tool through which their power could be extended:

They had financial deals with the mullahs. They would find the most important ones and they would help them. And the mullahs were smart: they knew that the British were the most important power in the world. It was also about money. The British would bring suitcases full of cash and give it to these people. For example, people in the bazaar, the wealthy merchants, would each have their own ayatollah that they would finance. And that's what the British were doing.³¹

Ashraf, in her memoirs, wrote about Britain's unholy ties to the clergy in Iran:

Many influential clergymen formed alliances with representatives of foreign powers, most often the British, and there was in fact a standing joke in Persia that said if you picked up a clergyman's beard, you would see the words "Made in England" stamped on the other side. These Shiite mullahs exercised a powerful influence over the minds of the masses. At times the voice of God seemed to be speaking with a British or Russian accent. It was difficult for the peasant to decipher where religion left off and politics began.³²

Ashraf added that after World War II, London bolstered the Islamic right as part of its Cold War strategy for the region. "With the encouragement of the British, who saw the mullahs as an effective counter-force to the Communists, the elements of the extreme religious right were starting to surface again, after years of being suppressed."³³

The shah himself, in memoirs written just before his death in exile, notes that the man who killed his minister of court in 1950, Fakhr Arai, had ties both to the Devotees of Islam and to the British. "Arai was involved with an ultraconservative religious group that was comprised of the most backward religious fanatics," he wrote, adding that he may also have had indirect ties to the British embassy in Teheran. "The British had their fingers in strange pies. The British had ties to the most reactionary clergy in the country."³⁴

By the early 1950s, Britain's stake in Iran was threatened. Since World War I, the British had enjoyed exclusive rights to Iran's oil. So it wasn't surprising when the United States at first viewed Mossadegh favorably. Mossadegh was seeking to renegotiate the Iran-U.K. oil agreement on terms more favorable to Teheran, and the British were rattling swords and making threats. Washington, at odds with London over Middle East oil, provided aid and sold arms to Mossadegh's government and, in 1951, Mossadegh visited Washington. "President Truman sent a note imploring the British not to invade Iran," wrote a leading historian.³⁵ But when Mossadegh rejected an American plan to allow U.S. oil companies into Iran, the United States switched course, and turned against Mossadegh. Suddenly, the fledgling CIA and Britain's MI6 joined together in a plot to topple Mossadegh.

Enter Kashani.

Until 1952., Kashani posed as an ally of Mossadegh's in the National Front, the nationalist coalition that governed Iran under the shah. But as the United States and the British moved against Mossadegh, Kashani abandoned him and moved into opposition. Kashani maintained covert ties to the Islamist-terrorist underground, but in public he adroitly distanced himself from the Devotees of Islam and their ilk. The CIA was well aware of Kashani's power. In a report in October 1952, "Prospects for Survival of Mossadeq Regime in Iran," the CIA noted:

Since Mossadeq returned to power in July 1952. there have been continuous reports of plots to overthrow him. Kashani and army officers are frequently mentioned as leaders. ... A contest in the streets between the forces supporting Mossadeq and Kashani would be bitter and destructive.³⁶

Among the forces that could be mobilized by Kashani, the CIA included "the Bazaar mobs and the bands organized by his son" and "the Fedayan terrorist organization of Moslem extremists." Even as that report was being written by the CIA's analysts, the CIA's covert-operations unit was already working with Kashani to mobilize his forces and to provoke exactly that "contest in the

streets." In a 1951 State Department memo, one of Kashani's allies is quoted predicting violence, saying that it "might be necessary ... to punish the communists physically."³⁷

In 1952-53, the CIA and MI6 approached Kashani and half a dozen other key Iranian religious leaders, offering money and other inducements to break with Mossadegh and support the shah. "Religious leaders were encouraged with funding to adopt a more fundamentalist line and break with Mossadegh," according to Dorril.³⁸ The British took the lead, using its vast intelligence network in Iran, including the resources of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which maintained its own, private secret service, the Central Information Bureau. The British, of course, were active in covert operations against Mossadegh long before the United States came on board, but the Americans reportedly had the chief pipeline to Kashani. Ann Lambton, a professor at Oxford's School of Oriental and African Studies and a former British intelligence officer, played a behind-the-scenes role in the action to undermine Mossadegh and, in a report at the time, she noted that "Kashani has received large sums of money from somewhere" and noted that it may have been coming from the CIA.³⁹

From 1946 to 1953, the man who ran U.S. covert operations in Iran was John Waller, a veteran of the American clandestine service who joined the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II and then served with the CIA until the 1970s. He spent much of World War II in Cairo and Teheran and as a very young man was given a leading responsibility. "Here I was," Waller recalls, "head of counterespionage for the Middle East at age nineteen." In 1946, barely into his twenties, he opened the first American intelligence station in postwar Iran, recruiting former German spies to assist the United States in the Cold War and working with Iran's tribal chieftains, including the Qashqai, the Bakhtiari, and the Kurds.

"We, in the field, liked Mossadegh," says Waller, now in his eighties. "In fact, his niece married a [CIA] case officer." But soon the Americans began to side with the British, who despised Mossadegh. "We had an obligation to our old ally, the British, and oil was an issue." According to Waller, one of the main props holding up Mossadegh were the mullahs and the bazaar. "The *bazaar* and the mullahs were very, very close. And the mullahs had control of the people, especially the lower classes," he says.⁴⁰

Of all of the religious leaders, the most important was Kashani, says Waller, who as the CIA station chief, developed a warm relationship with the fiery ayatollah during the seven years that he was stationed in Iran. "I did a portrait of Mullah Kashani, in pastels," Waller recalls, with a smile. "Or, I should say, Ayatollah Kashani. He sat for me for a bit, and I finished it from photographs." Waller insists that Kashani never became a full-fledged CIA "agent"—"you don't make an ayatollah your agent," he says—but adds that the United States and the British had several important agents in the anti-Mossadegh coalition, "some of whom were extremely adroit at handling both the bazaar and the mullahs." And Waller says:

It was obvious that the clergy were important. . . . Kashani told me why he was dropping out of the Mossadegh coalition. Because the Tudeh Party was being tolerated by Mossadegh. They were synonymous with the Russians, and religious men don't like communism. Kashani was the head man of his god, which gave him political power. It's like the Christian right here. He was the ayatollah, the Khomeini of the day. He had power over the church. He had power over the poor people, which was most of the people in the southern part of the city. And, from time immemorial, the mullahs were close to the bazaaris.

Did the CIA fund Kashani directly? "Yes," according to Waller. "It was money both to Kashani and to his chosen instruments, money to finance his communication channels, pamphleteering, and so on to the people in south Teheran." Waller adds, with a wry grin, that even ayatollahs are, well, corruptible. Choosing his words carefully, he says, "I think he was truly religious, but forgive me for being a cynic. Being religious doesn't distract you from political or commercial reality, or from sex."

With Kashani on board, the CIA and MI6 found it easier to stage street riots and demonstrations against Mossadegh and against the communists. Kashani's power among the masses of Teheran's slums and in the mosques was considerable. The military coup that ousted

Mossadegh was coupled with demonstrations financed by the CIA, using the crowds loyal to Kashani and organized by the clergy and by gangs of thugs in the pay of mobsters. Waller returned to Washington to oversee the coup d'etat from headquarters, and in the field the legendary Kermit Roosevelt ran the operation on the ground. Two Iranian brothers, the "Boscoes," under CIA control, and three other Iranian brothers, the Rashidians, under MI6 control, joined with Shaaban Jaafari, a famous Iranian athlete and performer, to work with Kashani in assembling the mobs. "One of our agents was a man called 'the Brawnless One,'" recalls Waller. "He was a sports hero, a juggler—getting him to work with us was like getting Babe Ruth. He could get a mob together fast. We paid for those."

"Through the Rashidians," wrote Dorril, the CIA and MI6 "established contact with conservative clerics such as Ayatollahs Borujerdi and Behbehani, who feared that Mossadeq's 'leftist advances were endangering national security,' and dissident mullahs from the National Front, Kashani and Makki, who claimed that the ministries were full of 'Kremlin-controlled atheists.'"⁴¹ Recalls Waller, "At the time Islam hadn't raised its head in an organized way. But communism and Islam have never been compatible."⁴²

An important part of the CIA's work in Iran in the early 1950s involved efforts to mobilize Iranian religious sentiment against the USSR. It came during a time when the United States was experimenting with Islamist anti-communist fervor in Egypt, Pakistan, and elsewhere. In Iran, much of the CIA's focus was directed against the communist Tudeh Party, although the Tudeh was never really a serious threat. Mossadegh was no communist, having come to power in part with U.S. support. But once he was placed on Washington's enemies list, the CIA went all-out to discredit him by portraying him as communist-controlled, especially in propaganda aimed at the mullahs. The propaganda effort was coordinated by two CIA officers whom we shall meet later, Donald Wilber and Richard Cottam.

At times, the propaganda was heavy-handed:

The next move was to bring out the psychological warfare assets. "In a lurid effort to totally discredit the left," Ayatollah Behbehani, who received money from the Americans, sent out letters bearing the insignia of the Tudeh Party, and containing "grisly threats" written in red ink "to hang all the mullahs from the lampposts of various Iranian cities."⁴³

According to Dorril, the CIA used journalists Kenneth Love of the *New York Times* and Don Schwind of the Associated Press as agents to circulate their propaganda.⁴⁴ Not only did the CIA use ayatollahs such as Behbehani to spread falsified threats from the Tudeh about hanging mullahs, but it paid violent agents provocateurs to rile up Iran's religious community. The CIA and MI6 paid thugs and rabble-rousers to pose as Tudeh followers in violent street demonstrations attacking Iran's Shiite establishment:

The mobs came out onto the streets.... A key aspect of the plot was to portray the mobs as supporters of the Tudeh Party in order to provide a suitable pretext for the coup and the resumption of power by the shah. [MI6 agents] hired a fake Tudeh crowd, comprising an unusual mixture of pan-Iranians and Tudeh members, paid for with fifty thousand dollars given to them by a CIA officer. Richard Cottam observed that agents working on behalf of the British "saw the opportunity and sent the people we had under our control into the streets to act as if they were Tudeh. They were more than just provocateurs, they were shock troops, who acted as if they were Tudeh people throwing rocks at mosques and [mullahs]." "The purpose" [another writer said], "was to frighten a majority of Iranians into believing that a victory for Mossadeq would be a victory for the Tudeh, the Soviet Union, and irreligion."⁴⁵

After the restoration of the shah, efforts were made to put the Islamist genie back in the bottle. But the force of political Islam, repressed in Iran since the 1920s, had now revived, thanks in part to the assistance of the CIA and MI6. It would not be so easy to quiet it down again, and in a very literal sense the forces that toppled the shah in 1979 were exactly those unleashed to return him to power in 1953. In the 1950s, the shah and his SAVAK secret service strove mightily to keep the

Islamists in check and to buy off, corrupt, or otherwise neutralize the medieval mullahs, including Khomeini. "During the shah's reign, the government paid the clergy, too," says Fereydoun Hoveyda, the former Iranian UN ambassador, whose brother served as the shah's prime minister for many years. "Some of the money came from my brother, and some of it came from SAVAK," he says. "And SAVAK had its own people in the clergy."⁴⁶ Yet the shah preferred to dismiss Islam as a relic of the past. And so when the movement against the shah began in earnest in the mid-1970s, neither the shah nor most of his sycophantic aides would recognize it for what it was.

After 1953, Kashani gradually faded from view. But his acolyte would introduce a virulent new strain of political Islam. He was just beginning his rise to power.

The 1940s and 1950s were still formative years for Khomeini. His political views were in flux, although Khomeini's writings during World War II reflected distaste for the "dark dictatorship" of Reza Shah, whose reign ended when he was deposed in 1941.⁴⁷ By instinct, Khomeini was prone to denounce the compliant, Shiite clerical establishment in Iran. He gravitated toward Kashani, Navab Safavi, and the Devotees of Islam, and began to refine his radical views. "Khomeini's own political position during this period was somewhere between that of the clerical establishment and the *Fedaiyan*," wrote Khomeini's biographer, Baqer Moin. He supported the fairly conservative Ayatollah Borujerdi, but

he was radically opposed to secularism, believed adamantly in the rule of the *sharia*, and had activist tendencies. He had absorbed, in other words, some of the ideas of the *Fedaiyan* perhaps in the course of conversations with Navab Safavi who, according to the latter's widow, was a frequent visitor to Khomeini's home.⁴⁸

Kashani began to act as Khomeini's mentor at this point.

Another indication of the Khomeini's political ideas at the time was his admiration for Ayatollah Abolqassem Kashani (i88z-ijfiz), who from 1945 was closely linked to the *Fedaiyan-e Islam*. . . . Khomeini was a frequent visitor to Kashani's home and admired his courage and stamina. He shared his views on many issues such as anti-colonialism, Islamic universalism, political activism, and populism.⁴⁹

During the 1953 coup, Khomeini was involved with the terrorist-inclined Devotees of Islam, even after Kashani decided to keep his distance. Yet Khomeini and Kashani remained close, and Khomeini followed Kashani's advice to break with Mossadegh and support the return of the shah. Still, Khomeini maintained ties to the Devotees, and he intervened in a vain effort to prevent the execution of Navab Safavi in the mid-1950s. But the calculating ayatollah learned a great deal from his experience in 1953. Kashani and the Devotees, he felt, were too political, and lost the all-important connection with the establishment ulema in the holy city of Qom. Borujerdi, on the other hand, though admired by Khomeini for his religious scholarship, was too distant from politics. Returning to Qom, Khomeini spent the next ten years seeking to unite the political and the religious elements of Iran's Shiite movement. He would next explode onto the scene in 1963-64, mounting a frontal challenge to the shah.

The United States, meanwhile, would forget all about Islam in Iran. The shah was reinstalled, and secure. Washington had won a healthy chunk of the Iranian oil industry for U.S. oil companies, and the United States was busily helping the shah build his army, his police force, and his much-feared intelligence service, the SAVAK. Despite the help of some of the mullahs in toppling Mossadegh, the imperial shah was in no mood to share power with anyone—liberals, businessmen, or clergy. So the Islamists seethed and simmered beneath him, unnoticed.

The story of political Islam and its burgeoning alliance with the United States now shifted to the Arab world. Nasser, victorious after the Suez War of 1956 and unbowed, was presenting an ever more serious challenge to the Cold War ideologues of the Eisenhower administration. Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood was crushed and forced into exile. To stop Nasser, and to support anti-communist and anti-nationalist forces across the entire Arab world, the United States turned to Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 9

Hell's Ayatollah

Never did a revolution catch the United States more by surprise than did the one that swamped Iran in 1978-79. For a moment, it seemed as if the entire U.S. position in the Middle East might crumble, that Saudi Arabia and the Gulf would fall to a revolution like that in Iran, that no Arab monarchy—from Jordan to Morocco—was safe. Panicky U.S. officials ordered the CIA to determine if Iran's Islamic revolution might spread, and the U.S. government hired a steady stream of experts on Islam to provide insights and predictions. National security experts worried that the line of defense along the Soviet Union's southern flank had been breached and that the USSR would take advantage of the collapse of Iran to swoop into the region and supplant the United States.

For the first time, political Islam moved to center stage, and the consequences would be profound. In Iran, in Afghanistan, in Pakistan, in widening, concentric circles, the Islamic right was no longer a marginal force but the driving energy behind a potentially region-wide transformation. For analysts of the big picture, it was no longer unthinkable to envisage a string of Islamist regimes from North Africa through Egypt and Sudan to Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia and into Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Yet when the dust cleared, the American position held. Iran—or so it appeared—was lost to American influence, but the rest of the empire seemed secure. With the exception of marginal Sudan, where the Islamic right seized power in the 1980s, the Iranian virus seemed to have been contained. So for many policy makers, spooks, and specialists in the Middle East, it was back to business as usual. The revolution in Iran was dismissed as a special case, and while Iran itself was regarded as a regional threat, the United States did not begin to regard the Islamic right as a significant foe. The United States maintained close ties—including covert ones, through intelligence liaisons—with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, the two bastions of Sunni Islamic fundamentalism. The Islamist insurrections against Syria and the PLO crested in the 1980s, and neither one caused any alarm in U.S. policy circles. And in the 1980s the United States spent more than \$3 billion supporting the Afghan mujahideen, whose political objectives were difficult to distinguish from those of Iran's ayatollahs. The American alliance with the Islamic right rolled on.

In various ways, too, the United States tried to connect with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Carter administration's liberals tried to befriend the seemingly moderate, American- and European-educated Islamists around Khomeini, who wore suits instead of clerical garb, while many U.S. neoconservatives, including officials in President Reagan's administration, reached out instead to the hard-core clergy and the Qom-based ayatollahs who were the real power in Teheran. Neither of these initiatives bore fruit, however, and Iran for the next quarter-century would bedevil U.S. policy.

The revolution in Iran stunned and confounded the United States. A confused, bumbling, and often contradictory policy toward Iran's revolutionaries marked U.S. policy from 1977, when the first stirring of the revolt occurred, through the uprising, the fall of the shah, the near-civil war that gripped Iran until 1981, and the consolidation of the clerical regime in the 1980s.

First, Washington exhibited an inertial reliance on its nearly unlimited confidence in the shah. Throughout the 1970s, U.S. intelligence reports repeatedly concluded that the shah's regime was secure, and these optimistic assessments continued up to the very eve of the revolution, leading many U.S. policy makers to believe that the shah was not seriously threatened. In these reports, Iran's Islamic movement was usually ignored or relegated to a footnote. The CIA's aid to Iran's Islamists in 1953 was ancient history, and in the decades that followed the shah marginalized the ayatollahs, exiling some—including Khomeini—and buying off others. The State Department and the CIA complacently ignored Islam in Iran, which suited the shah just fine: the shah vigorously opposed U.S. contacts with Iran's clergy, even with the more docile, pro-regime ayatollahs on the shah's payroll.

But after the Carter administration got its national security team in place in 1977, the United States began pressing the Iranian monarch for reforms and established a pattern of intensive, sub

rosa consultations with Iranian opposition groups, including key religious leaders. This had the effect of weakening the shah's resolve, confusing his regime, and buoying the religious right. The U.S. goal in making these contacts was not revolution, but what many hoped would be a more stable, pro-U.S. constitutional monarchy. Part of what was driving this effort were persistent rumors—apparently backed by solid U.S. intelligence reports—that the shah had cancer. (He did, and he died in exile in 1980.) Those who pursued this policy apparently believed that the shah was strong enough to weather a transition peacefully, and that it would result in more power for Iran's intellectual elite, the aging heirs of Mohammed Mossadegh's National Front, the technocrats, and a smattering of moderate Shiite religious elements. What they didn't realize was that the anti-shah movement would be driven increasingly by the religious right, above all by the steely, Lenin-like figure of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Then, however, during the revolution itself—especially from November 1978 to the capture of Teheran by Khomeini in February 1979—the Carter administration fell into bitter internal warfare, with some arguing that the United States ought to abandon the shah and others urging that the United States support a bloody military putsch against the revolution. During those crucial four months the United States had no policy at all, and in any case it was too late to change the course of events. The shah fled, his government collapsed, and the Islamic Republic of Iran was born. Those who had argued for abandoning the shah had clearly underestimated the Islamist revolutionaries, and now they counted on the emergence of a democratic successor regime with a slight Islamist tinge, not a dictatorship. Those who had argued for a coup, which would have led to tens of thousands of deaths, had also underestimated the depth and power of the Khomeini movement. Their view was often colored by the insistent, though absurd, belief that the USSR was behind the trouble in Iran. How could so powerful an American ally as the shah of Iran be toppled if it weren't Moscow's doing?

American policy wasn't any clearer after the revolution. The United States had precious few experts on Iran's Islamist movement. The U.S. diplomats who went to Iran after the revolution were mostly not Iran specialists, and they knew little about Islam or about Khomeini and his ilk. Many of them worked hard to implement the official policy of trying to work out a modus vivendi with the Islamic republic, but that policy came crashing down when the U.S. embassy was invaded by a mob in November 1979. The Western-educated, suit-wearing aides to Khomeini—men like Ibrahim Yazdi, Sadeq Ghotbzadeh, and Abolhassan Bani-Sadr—were swept away in the "second revolution" that followed the embassy takeover, and the Qom-based clergy and Khomeini asserted near-dictatorial control.

Meanwhile, U.S. hard-liners were not ready to give up on Iran. Some saw Iran's Islamic orientation as a threat to the Soviet Union. They counted on Iran's fear of its Russian neighbor to the north and on the Islamists' hostility to communism to move Iran back into accord with the United States. Supporters of Israel—and, of course, Israel itself—saw even the militant mullahs as potential allies. Even during the U.S. embassy crisis, Reagan and the neoconservatives made overtures to the mullahs. By the mid-1980s, the neoconservatives, Israeli intelligence, and Col. Oliver North of the National Security Council joined Bill Casey of the CIA in a secret initiative reaching out to the strongman of Iran, Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani.

The religious revolution in Iran did more than kick the props out from underneath America's most important outpost in the region. It crystallized a fundamental change in the character of the Islamic right, one that had been taking shape since the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood decades earlier. As it gained strength in the 1970s, the Islamic right grew more assertive, and parts of it were radicalized. Violence-prone offshoots, typified by the emergence of an Islamist terrorist underground in Egypt, emerged to challenge Western-oriented regimes, and the terrorist Hezbollah movement gained force in Lebanon. Even the more mainstream Islamist groups were inspired by the example of Iran, and many Muslim Brotherhood-linked organizations took on a more pronounced political character.

The errors that the United States committed during and after the revolution in Iran were almost Shakespearean in their tragic scope. An enormous part of the blame falls on the U.S. intelligence system. The fall of the shah was the most significant failure of U.S. intelligence between Pearl

Harbor and the attacks of September 11, 2001. As the United States eagerly lent support to the Afghan jihadists and reached out to supposedly moderate mullahs in Teheran, almost no one in the intelligence community was looking at the big picture. To the American public, the dark-eyed, scowling visage of Ayatollah Khomeini symbolized the emergence of a threatening new force on the world scene. But for U.S. diplomats and intelligence officers, right-wing political Islam continued to be profoundly misunderstood. Even as Islamism's power made itself felt—in the violence in Mecca, civil war in Syria, Sadat's assassination—the United States failed to grasp its implications. Even after Iran, Islamism was not seen as a worldwide movement linked by fraternal bonds and secret societies, but as a fragmented, country-by-country ideological movement. The naive argued that Iran was a unique case, a conservative dictatorship that had fallen to a peculiar form of Shiite militancy that would have no resonance among the Sunni Muslim majority. Others, naive in a different and more dangerous way, were seized with the notion that Iranian-style Islamism and the Muslim Brotherhood could be mobilized in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a tool for dismantling the Soviet Union. Despite the pronounced anti-American feeling at the heart of Islamism, key officials—from Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, to Ronald Reagan's CIA director, Bill Casey— would aggressively pursue the idea that political Islam was just another pawn on what Brzezinski called "the Grand Chessboard."

The Return of the Ayatollah

On February 2, 1979, just a day after Ayatollah Khomeini made his triumphant return to Iran, George Lambrakis, a senior U.S. embassy officer in Teheran, dispatched a long missive to Washington. In it, he mused about the implications of the takeover of Iran by Khomeini and his ilk. And he wasn't too worried. His assessment is worth quoting at length, because it shows how profoundly the United States underestimated the Khomeini movement only days before the ayatollah took control of Iran:

Our best assessment to date is that the Shia Islamic movement is far better organized, enlightened, and able to resist communism than its detractors would lead us to believe. It is rooted in the Iranian people more than any Western ideology, including communism. However, its governing procedures are not clear, and probably have not totally been worked out. It is possible that the process of governing might produce accommodations with anti-clerical, intellectual strains which exist in the opposition to produce something more closely approaching Westernized democratic processes than might at first be apparent. . . .

The Islamic establishment is neither as weak nor as ignorant as the shah's government and some Western observers would portray it. It has a far better grip on the emotions of the people and on the money of the bazaar than any other group. In many ways it supports a reformist/traditionalist view of Iran which is far more attractive to most Iranians at this time than the models of communism represented by the Soviet Union or mainland China.

On the other hand, it is not guaranteed to operate in a parliamentary democratic fashion as we understand it in the West.... A good deal of authority is likely to be exercised by an Islamic Council. Though the make-up of such a council is still not clear, under the movement's program, political leaders rather than mullahs would appear destined to play the preponderant role in making and executing government policy. . . . We suspect that the Moslem establishment would probably not be able to avoid making some accommodations with Westernized ideas of government held by many in the opposition movement.¹

Khomeini had returned to Iran, from Paris, on February 1, just a day before Lambrakis's memo was written. Nine days later, the interim government of Iran collapsed and the mullahs created the dictatorship that has lasted more than a quarter of a century. President Carter welcomed the new Iranian government and optimistically reached out to its leaders, but ominously, on February 14, a Khomeini-inspired mob seized control of the U.S. embassy in Iran, only to withdraw after tense negotiations. Nine months later, a similar mob invaded the embassy and held scores of American personnel hostage for more than a year, precipitating one of the greatest diplomatic crises in American history. By the end of it, Khomeini reigned unchallenged as Iran's dictator.

How could Lambrakis have been so wrong? Why did a senior U.S. government official—and he was not alone—believe that Khomeini and his clerical mafia would cede power to "political leaders rather than mullahs"? Why would he describe the Khomeini movement as "enlightened"? Why would he expect that something "closely approaching Westernized democratic processes" would emerge?

There is plenty of blame to go around. Neither the State Department, nor the CIA, nor the vaunted community of foreign policy think tanks, nor academia got Iran right. Most of the blame must go to the U.S. government, for mixing blind ignorance of Iran with sheer incompetence. But the blindness extended to many leading U.S. academic specialists on Iran. Several—the University of Texas's James Bill, the University of Texas's Marvin Zonis, and the University of Pittsburgh's Richard Cottam, the former CIA officer—acted as semi-official consultants to the White House and the State Department in 1978-79. Bill, whose book, *The Eagle and the Lion*, is often cited as a definitive work on U.S.-Iran relations, authored a major piece in *Foreign Affairs*, the journal of the Council on Foreign Relations, in late 1978 that, like Lambrakis's missive, also completely missed the mark. Even as Khomeini thundered against the shah from Iraq and then from France, and mobs carried photos of the ayatollah down the streets of every major Iranian city, in "Iran and the Crisis of 1978" Bill concluded that

. . . the most probable alternative if the Pahlavi dynasty should be destroyed by force and violence is that a left-wing, progressive group of middle-ranking army officers would take charge.... Other future possibilities include a right-wing military junta, a liberal democratic system based on Western models, and a communist government.²

Nowhere in the piece does Bill even mention the possibility of an Islamic republic, even though by then Ayatollah Khomeini was the clearly acknowledged leader of the revolution. Bill, one of the United States' few experts on Iran, was not the only one to misread Iran's future. As the wave of Iran's revolution crested in November 1978, a high-level meeting at the State Department was called to analyze the unfolding crisis. Henry Precht, the department's Iran desk officer, recalls how—despite all the intelligence available to him—he got his analysis from a handful of Iranian students he met the night before:

Late in November 1978, we called in all the experts on Iran, officers who'd served there, others, and we had this big confab to discuss what to do about Iran and what was going to happen there. Well, the night before I'd guest-lectured at a class at American University, and it turned out there were a lot of Iranian students there. And when I asked what they thought was going to happen in Iran, they all said: Islamic government. The next day, at our conference, we went around the room all saying what we thought would happen, and people were saying things like, "There will be a liberal government, with the National Front, and Khomeini will go to Qom." When my turn came I said, "Islamic government." I was the only one.³

The fact the U.S. government got Iran so wrong cannot be seen as anything but a massive intelligence failure. But the failure was not due to a lack of information, for the revolution was unfolding in the streets, and Khomeini was not an invisible actor. Yet the United States, which initially had supreme confidence in the shah of Iran, was convinced that Iran was stable and not susceptible to revolution. Even as the revolution gained momentum, and it seemed increasingly clear that the shah could not survive, the United States refused to believe that Khomeini and the clergy would seize power for themselves, preferring to believe that some sort of religious-secular hybrid democracy would emerge in the chaos that followed the fall of the shah. Thomas Ahern, the CIA station chief in Iran in 1979, arrived months after the revolution and was taken hostage by the Khomeini-directed mob that seized the embassy on November 4, spending 444 days as a captive. According to Ahern, the revolution should have been plain to see, for anyone who cared to look out the window in 1978. He recalls that when he returned to CIA headquarters in 1981, after being freed, the agency was bemoaning its failure to anticipate the revolution. "After I got back, there was

a senior person in the Near East Division lamenting the intelligence failure about the fall of the shah," recalls Ahern. "And I looked at him and asked him if he hadn't been looking at what was going on in the streets!" The CIA, Ahern said, treated the problem of pre-revolutionary Iran in traditional spy-versus-spy fashion, trying to discover secrets about the Khomeini movement and the stability of the shah. But, he says, the CIA failed to draw obvious inferences from what was going on in day-to-day affairs, and so it stuck with its seemingly safe prediction that the shah was going to survive. "We joined the rest of the government apparatus in telling the White House what it wanted to hear, which is that this was just a nuisance and that the shah was just fine, and that with unlimited support from the United States he would weather the storm. There was a failure at the working level to speak truth to power."⁴

In the 1970s, that power rested with three factions in U.S. policy circles, each of which approached Iran in different ways, and—each in its own way—didn't see Khomeini's victory coming. For each, Ayatollah Khomeini was like a Rorschach test, a dark figure in whom specialists on Iran and senior policy makers could see what they wanted to see. All made mistakes, and in doing so helped Khomeini succeed.

First were the Kissinger-led realists, who guided U.S. policy toward Iran in the first half of the decade. For them, Khomeini was nearly invisible. They'd spent the 1970s building Iran into a regional power, the policeman of the Gulf, and America's bulwark against the USSR and Arab nationalism. Their allies included the CIA, from Richard Helms, the CIA director appointed as ambassador to Iran in 1973 who as a boy had gone to school with the shah in Switzerland in the 1930s, to the veterans of 1953, including the Roosevelt brothers: Kermit, the covert operator extraordinaire, and Archie, another CIA veteran who was a senior official at David Rockefeller's Chase Manhattan Bank. Kissinger, Helms, the Roosevelts, Rockefeller, and the big oil and defense firms had spent years turning Iran into a virtual American colony, especially under President Richard Nixon. They grumbled at the shah's occasional efforts to assert independence as Iran grew stronger, and they were annoyed at the shah's extravagance and seeming megalomania. They bristled at the shah's readiness to make business deals with the Soviet Union from time to time. But more important was the bottom line: Iran was hosting tens of thousands of U.S. military advisers. It was the number-one market for expensive weapons systems, and could be counted as an ally in the Cold War everywhere. And it was a very profitable place to do business. Iran was an American outpost at the heart of the world's oil supply. During the Carter administration, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the national security adviser, most closely approximated the Nixon-Kissinger view of Iran.

Second were the Carter administration liberals. For them, Khomeini was not invisible, but he was a vague force in the background, seemingly less important than a diverse collection of intellectuals, left-liberals, reformers, and former National Front activists. The Carter liberals in Washington were wary of the shah and concerned about the arms buildup in Iran. Not as hawkish as Brzezinski, they were troubled by the Nixon-Kissinger willingness to allow the shah a blank check in building up his military. They were also unhappy with the shah's record on human rights and with the authoritarian nature of the regime. In keeping with Carter's oft-spoken desire to promote human rights abroad, they pressed the shah to liberalize the regime. Some clearly felt that wholesale reform, and even the end of the shah's regime, was an important goal of U.S. foreign policy. In that connection, Khomeini's forces were seen not as a threat, but as a suitably anti-communist junior partner in a broad Iranian national reform movement. During the administration, the liberals were represented by the State Department, particularly the Iran desk and the human rights team.

Third were the hard-right advocates of Cold War supremacy and American might. Today, they would be called the "neoconservatives." During the Carter administration, the right was mostly in opposition, and it gradually coalesced around candidate Ronald Reagan in the late 1970s. Closely allied with Israel—which, in turn, was joined with Iran in an axis against the Arabs—the neoconservatives weren't fazed by Khomeini. Though they supported the shah, they didn't hesitate to develop close, though covert, connections with the Khomeini regime after 1979. In 1980, Reagan's team engaged in secret talks on arms and hostages with Teheran's ayatollahs in a

calculated effort to undermine Carter, in what has come to be known as the "October Surprise" scandal. Besides arms, Israel also provided Iran with intelligence throughout its war with Iraq. And, together, Israel and the neoconservatives, along with Bill Casey, inaugurated the Iran-contra scandal, involving yet additional arms sales to Khomeini's regime, from both Israel and the United States.

Carter and the Shah

The inauguration of Jimmy Carter as president alarmed the shah and encouraged the Iranian opposition, from the intellectuals in the National Front to the ayatollahs of the Islamic right. Carter's inauguration in 1977, for many Iranians, triggered memories of an earlier period in U.S.-Iran relations—not the CIA's 1953 coup d'etat, which restored the shah to power, but the early 1960s, when the Kennedy administration toyed with the idea of unseating the shah and replacing him with a less authoritarian regime. The Carter White House placed great emphasis on human rights, and many administration officials objected to the old policy of building up the shah's power.

Both the monarchy and the mullahs remembered the Kennedy administration, and they saw it as a precedent. During the Kennedy years, John Bowling, the Iran specialist at the State Department, wrote a paper analyzing Iran's opposition forces and "discussing the advantages of a Western policy shift of support for a nationalist, more popularly based, Mosaddiqist coup."⁵ But the doubts about the shah didn't start with Kennedy, according to a former high-ranking CIA official who was involved in the discussions:

There was a big debate, in the U.S. government and in the embassy: Should we support the shah, or a nationalist government? This had been going on since about 1958, when the National Front reconstituted itself. The question was: Do we want to supplant the shah or support the nationalists? There was talk about something like a British-style monarchy, with real power resting in an elected government. In the end, Kennedy made the decision to support the shah, but on condition that there would be real reforms, and that the shah would accept [the reformist] Ali Amini as prime minister.⁶

In his book, James Bill noted: "Kennedy's doubts about the shah were so strong that he even considered forcing his abdication in favor of rule by regency until his young son came of age."⁷ In principle, Kennedy's concern about the shah wasn't misplaced, but the problem in the early 1960s, as in the late 1970s, was that no alternative existed outside of the clergy to replace the shah. The National Front had lost nearly all of its support in the years since Mossadegh, and increasingly it was confined to salons in Teheran, with allies among intellectuals in Western Europe. Pressed by the United States, the shah made halfhearted efforts at reform, in what he called the White Revolution. Sensing blood, the clergy had begun to stir, and in the outlying districts the religious right—which had close ties to the wealthy landed families—began to mobilize the population against land reform. Violent incidents took place in many provinces and the prime movers were the mullahs, increasingly led by Ruhollah Khomeini. Not yet an ayatollah, he came to prominence after making a demagogic speech in 1963 denouncing the shah. To create his political organization, Khomeini established the Coalition of Islamic Societies, led by twenty-one wealthy *bazaar* merchants from three major Teheran mosques. Many of the participants in Khomeini's coalition would later become the leaders of the regime in 1979 and serve as top officials of the Islamic Republican Party, including Mohammed Hosseini Beheshti.⁸

The shah had nothing but disdain for the clergy. In a January 1963 speech, he sputtered with rage at the Khomeini-led mullahs:

They were always a stupid and reactionary bunch whose brains have not moved [for] a thousand years. Who is opposing [the White Revolution]? Black reaction, stupid men who don't understand it and are ill intentioned.... It was they who formed a small and ludicrous gathering from a handful of bearded, stupid bazaaris to make noises. They don't want this country to develop.⁹

Such talk didn't endear the shah to the clergy. In 1963, Khomeini was arrested by SAVAK. Rumors circulated that he was to be tried and executed. But it was unprecedented to impose the death penalty on an ayatollah. In 1964, Khomeini was expelled from Iran, first to Turkey and then to Iraq, settling in the holy city of Najaf, where he would remain until 1978.

In 1977, recalling the Kennedy years, the shah and the clergy both anticipated that the new U.S. regime might begin to put pressure on the monarchy, creating room for the clergy to organize. Indeed, it did. According to the Iranian ambassador in London, the shah feared "that Jimmy Carter might have 'Kennedy-type pretensions.'"¹⁰ The shah had cracked down on his clerical opposition once again in the early 1970s, arresting many of Khomeini's allies, including Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, the future strongman of the Khomeini regime. But the election of Carter, whose commitment to human rights resonated in Iran, stirred the clergy once again. In May 1977, Cyrus Vance, the U.S. secretary of state, visited Teheran to see the shah. "After Vance's visit, the word spread quickly through the extensive Iranian grapevine that the shah had just been given his orders from Washington: liberalize or be removed," wrote Bill. "It soon became accepted fact in Teheran. ... The opposition ... concluded that they could now operate under an American protective umbrella that had been raised by Cyrus Vance."¹¹

According to Charles Cogan, a former CIA official who headed the agency's Near East Division, Vance foresaw a peaceful revolution in Iran leading to a regime that might even include Khomeini:

Vance and, shall we say, the State Department in general looked forward towards the possibility of a smooth transition whereby the monarchy would cede some power to the dissidents who were considered to be not just Khomeini but moderates around him, and there were some, and this could be a successful transition to the parliamentary constitutional monarchy.¹²

Slowly at first, and then accelerating as the rebellion against the shah gathered momentum, U.S. embassy officers, visiting American officials, the CIA, and semi-official envoys from Washington began making contacts with the opposition. "The shah was very angry in the late 1970s over the fact that opposition figures and members of the clergy were going in and out of the U.S. embassy," says Juan Cole, a University of Michigan professor and expert on Islam.¹³ That view is confirmed by Charles Naas, a senior political officer at the U.S. embassy in Teheran, who worked under Ambassador Bill Sullivan. Sullivan, a tough-talking Irishman who served in some rough-and-tumble posts, including Laos during the CIA's covert war in that country, arrived in Iran in 1977, replacing Helms. According to Naas, Sullivan aggressively sought contacts with the anti-shah opposition: "When Bill Sullivan went out, I told him that I'd never worked on a country where I knew less about the politics there," says Naas. "When he got there, he started encouraging the political section to go out and meet more people, and they talked to young technocrats and National Front people, including a few people who had a good feel for the religious leaders."¹⁴

The shah, says Naas, "was aware that we had changed our m.o. and had started encouraging the opposition." In his memoirs, the shah put it this way: "The Americans wanted me out.... I was never told about the split in the Carter administration [nor] about the hopes some U.S. officials put in the viability of an 'Islamic Republic' as a bulwark against communism."¹⁵

The key player in bridging the divide between the secular National Front and the clergy was Mehdi Bazargan, the founder of the Liberation Movement, a religious, pro-clerical party. Destined to become the first prime minister of Iran after the revolution, Bazargan had a long history of working with the mullahs, but he also maintained a long-running dialogue with U.S. State Department and CIA officers. In fact, Bazargan himself was a quasi-mullah. "Bazargan," says an ex-CIA operations officer who served in Iran, "was basically an ayatollah, or what they called an 'ayatollah without a turban.'"¹⁶ Inevitably, the U.S. effort to reach out to the opposition not only dismayed the shah but emboldened the opposition, especially its religious component. "These signals were mistaken by Bazargan and others," says Naas. "After the revolution, Bazargan told me, 'You have no idea how encouraged we were by President Carter.' This is one of those signals that goes wrong."

From his post at the United Nations, Fereydoun Hoveyda, Iran's ambassador, watched as the Carter administration undermined the shah. A coalition was emerging between the opposition liberals, Bazargan's religious movement, and the Khomeini-led clergy. "The Americans were in constant contact with the liberals in Iran after 1977," he says. "They told these liberals, especially Bazargan and the National Front, that the time had come to come out with dissent and protest. That I know for sure. Some of them told me at the time: the Americans are telling us, 'It's time to protest.'... I told [Americans] that it was like playing with fire. You are bringing in the worst possible enemy of the West." A top official in the State Department recalls a meeting in 1977 during which he used the very same words. "Jessica Tuchman and some of the other people on the National Security Council staff were arguing against supporting the shah, arguing against supplying him with tear gas to use against the demonstrators," he says. "And I told them: 'You don't know what you are talking about. You have no idea of the political dynamics of Iran, because nobody does. You're playing with fire.'"¹⁷

U.S. Intelligence and Iran

Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution unfolded in slow motion, over several years. Only the most obtuse could be surprised at its outcome. A string of U.S. intelligence reports on Iran were wildly off the mark. A State Department analysis written in May 1972, suggests that even then some diplomats saw Khomeini as embodying "liberal values," albeit with diminishing appeal:

The Shah of Iran maintains a posture of public piety and champions Islamic causes even though Iranians . . . are not greatly attracted by pan-Islamic sentiments. The Iranian clergy no longer have major political influence. . . . They have been, for the past decade, fighting a rear-guard and losing action against the growing tide of a secular state.... Ayatollah Khomeini, arrested and exiled to Iraq in 1964 as a result of his anti-government activities, aspires to lead Iranian Muslims, but his close cooperation with the Government of Iraq in anti-Shah propaganda and activity have ruled out any chance of reconciliation with the present shah and reduced his appeal to many Iranian Muslims who might otherwise share some of his basically liberal values.¹⁸

Charles Naas, who served as the State Department's director of Iran affairs from 1974 to 1978, and then served as deputy chief of mission in Teheran during the revolution, says that throughout the period leading up to 1979, U.S. government analysis of Iran was poor, especially when it came to so-called National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs), prepared by the CIA's National Intelligence Council. "In doing NIEs at the time, the general view was that the religious right didn't represent a threat to the regime," Naas says. "There was practically no reporting on the Islamic groups in the country, so we were caught relatively flat-footed." In the August 1977 National Intelligence Estimate on Iran, "Iran in the 1980s," the CIA concluded that "the shah will be an active participant in Iranian life well into the 1980s" and that "there will be no radical change in Iranian political behavior in the near future." A year later, in August 1978, a second CIA report concluded that Iran seemed to be headed for a smooth transition of power if and when the shah left the scene. The CIA went on to say: "Iran is not in a revolutionary or even a 'pre-revolutionary' situation."¹⁹ By 1978, President Carter, who was watching Iran disintegrate on television, complained in writing to the national security bureaucracy, saying that he was "dissatisfied with the quality of political intelligence" he was getting on Iran.²⁰ Yet the CIA, lacking Iran specialists, Farsi speakers, and experts on Islamism, could not do better.

Admiral Stansfield Turner was Carter's CIA director. "In 1977, Islam as a political force was not on our radar scope," he says. "The intelligence community was not adequately prepared to understand it. We underestimated Khomeini's potential by a large margin."²¹ But it was worse than that. Outside of a handful of Iran specialists, virtually no one in the Carter administration had any idea of who Khomeini was until it was too late. Henry Precht, who served as the Iran desk officer in 1978, recalls getting a dispatch from Teheran at the height of the revolutionary fervor. "The department received a cable from the embassy in Teheran, mentioning Khomeini and identifying

him as 'an Iranian religious leader,'" says Precht. "To have identified him like that to your readers back in Washington told me that there wasn't a great awareness of who he was."

Although thousands of Americans, including hundreds of U.S. officials and a major CIA station were based in Iran, few if any of them had any familiarity with Iran's subcultures, religious underground, and opposition forces. Virtually all U.S. officials who have written memoirs about the Iranian revolution recall that the United States relied on the shah and his inner circle for information about Iran's internal politics. Partly that was because Washington trusted the shah implicitly and believed that his intelligence and security system were infallible, and partly it was because the shah strongly objected to any efforts by the United States to contact the clergy and the opposition. Walter Cutler, a veteran U.S. diplomat who served in Tabriz, Iran's second largest city, in the 1960s, says that even then it was difficult to establish contact with the clergy. "In Tabriz, when I was there, I was instructed to talk to the mullahs," he recalls. "But it was clear with the shah: Don't mess around the religious elements. There was a healthy presence by SAVAK."²² By the 1970s, when Nixon and Kissinger established the U.S. partnership with the shah, U.S. officials were discouraged by Washington, too, to stay away from the opposition and the religious elements. The huge CIA station in Iran was focused primarily on Cold War objectives, keeping track of Soviet bloc personnel in Iran and overseeing the U.S. surveillance apparatus aimed at the USSR in northern Iran.

A senior CIA official who served in Iran said that because the shah was an ally who didn't want U.S. spies meddling with the clergy, the religious opposition was off-limits.²³ Precht indicates that U.S. contacts with the clergy were being carefully tracked by Iran's intelligence service. "At one point, the embassy political officer had arranged to go talk to a mullah," says Precht. "And the ambassador got a call from the minister of the court, saying, 'Your political officer has an appointment with so-and-so.' We don't think that's a good idea."²⁴

Beginning in the mid-1970s, however, rumblings were picked up, remotely at first, by the U.S. intelligence community. According to several U.S. officials, the first to sense trouble were the British, who were able to draw on their centuries-long presence in the country, and the Israelis, whose secret service, the Mossad, was plugged into the bazaar. "The best sources I had were the British," says Precht. "They were much more informed, much more insightful. And their reporting, their assessments were not upbeat." Israel, too, sensed that the shah was finished long before the United States did. Around 1976, says Precht, while he was escorting a U.S. senator on a tour of Iran, they began with a briefing from Ambassador Helms, who told the senator that Iran was secure. "Well, we went to see Uri Lubrani, the man in charge of representing Israel in Iran, and he said that the shah was facing a serious problem from his religious opposition. That was the first time I'd heard that. No one in the embassy was saying that." Two years later, according to Precht, the warnings from Israel were more urgent. "In 1978, an Israeli foreign service officer came to see us at the Department, and he said: 'We are already in the post-shah era.' He told us, we should prepare ourselves."²⁵ At the time, most U.S. government officials believed that the shah would weather the storm. Starting in the mid-1970s, it began to dawn on policy makers and U.S. intelligence officials that the shah would fall. "You could take a calendar of 1977 and 1978," says Harold Saunders, who was then the assistant secretary of state for Near East and South Asian affairs, "and put people on the calendar as to when they decided that the shah's regime could not endure."

A critical, but previously unexamined aspect of U.S. decision making on Iran in the 1970s is related to the shah's fatal illness. It is important because if it were known that the shah was fatally stricken, it would drastically affect all calculations about Iran's future; were the shah to die in office, with no clear mode of transferring power, a very real danger would exist that Iran could plunge into chaos. The shah's illness was diagnosed as early as 1969, according to Hoveyda, whose brother was Iran's prime minister. "It was only in the mid-1970s that I heard that he had cancer," he says, though it was a closely guarded secret. But he insists: "The United States must have known, because secrets like that cannot be kept, especially because the shah got second and third opinions, and he was consulting with American physicians, too."²⁶ Carter administration policy makers and intelligence officials provide conflicting testimony about how much the United States

knew about the shah's cancer, and when it learned about it. Harold Saunders, the Middle East chief at the State Department, says that the United States did not know that the shah was sick until after he'd left Iran. But Charles Cogan, the ex-CIA official, said that the Iran crisis in fact began "when the shah's illness became apparent, not to us but to the French, very early in '76. And I think that we finally became aware of the gravity of it in '76."²⁷ According to Cogan, Richard Helms, who was U.S. ambassador to Teheran, suspected that the shah had cancer and told Washington so. "I think it was '75 that Helms wrote something to that effect back to Washington, but it seemed to escape people's attention," says Cogan. "The French were aware of this as far back as 1972, because one of the doctors that was treating the shah was in some way affiliated with the French intelligence service."²⁸ Another senior CIA official with enormous experience in Iran says flatly: "We knew the shah was ill. We had reports from—well, from a very good source."²⁹ By the late 1970s, it wasn't hard for U.S. intelligence to put two and two together, and to conclude that the shah was nearing the end of the road. David Long, who worked in the State Department's intelligence bureau, says that it was enough to make actionable judgments: "The fact that the shah was ill, that he had cancer, was known. But it was very closely held. But we knew enough, the worker-bees, to know that this guy was in heavy doo-doo. It was our job to handicap this."³⁰

Among the very last to come to the conclusion that the shah was finished were Brzezinski and the Rockefeller-Kissinger pro-shah partisans, who clung to the belief late into 1978 that the shah would survive. The U.S. embassy in Teheran was slow to realize the extent of the threat to the shah, but U.S. consulates outside the capital were more in tune with the pulse of the country, and their reporting back to Washington was somewhat more perceptive. Individual CIA experts, some of whom had spent years in Iran, were among the first to understand that Iran was collapsing. "I left Iran in 1976, and I told four close friends to get their money out of the country, that Iran was going down the tubes," says one CIA officer.³¹ But that pessimism didn't find its way into the rosy-scenario intelligence estimates prepared for the U.S. government.

Ambassador Sullivan, in Teheran, held on to the belief in the summer of 1978 that the shah's regime would continue. In his memoirs, *Mission to Iran*, he noted that some diplomats felt that the shah would fall, citing in particular a French embassy official who "expected the shah to be overthrown within a year." Yet, said Sullivan: "We felt that the shah was in trouble ... but we did not see the beginnings of a revolution."³² A year earlier, in a dispatch to Washington entitled "Straws in the Wind," Sullivan had taken note of growing religious unrest in Iran, adding: "There are hints that despite their right-wing fanaticism, some of the more pragmatic conservative Islamic imams and ayatollahs are willing to ride the human rights horse into alliance with those on the left [i.e., the National Front] where mutual interests can be made to coincide." Obliquely, Sullivan mentioned that religious "restiveness" had been reinforced by a parallel revival of Islamism in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, but concluded that the shah's government would keep the religious movement "under control."³³ In his memoirs, Sullivan admits that he was mystified about Islam and that neither his staff nor the CIA could help him:

My efforts to penetrate further into the mysteries of Shiism were constantly frustrated. ... Neither our political officers nor our intelligence officers were able to satisfy my interest in obtaining further insights into the workings of the Shia mind.³⁴

Richard Cottam and the "Americans"

One former U.S. official who purported to understand the "Shia mind" was Richard Cottam. In the early and mid-1950s, Cottam served in Iran as part of the CIA's covert operations team. "He was a case officer of mine," says John Waller, the station chief in Iran in the late 1940s and early 1950s.³⁵ Cottam became a University of Pittsburgh professor in 1958, but didn't leave either the CIA or skullduggery far behind. During the 1960s and 1970s, Cottam maintained close ties to Iranian dissidents, from the National Front to leading religious figures. He was especially close to two men who would serve, in 1978, as Khomeini's closest aides during his exile in Paris, while the revolution in Iran was unfolding: Ibrahim Yazdi and Sadegh Ghotbzadeh—nicknamed "the

Americans." Both men spent many years living in or visiting the United States, and both worked with the Muslim Brotherhood-linked Muslim Students Association, which Yazdi helped to found in 1963. Cottam had first met Yazdi in Iran in the 1950s, while working as a CIA officer, and the two men became close friends. During the 1960s, Yazdi traveled back and forth between Iran, Paris, and the United States, working with Ghotbzadeh and many other religious-minded Iranian activists who supported Ayatollah Khomeini. In 1967, Yazdi settled in Houston, Texas, taking up a research and teaching post at Baylor Medical College.

Early in 1978, Cottam's name began to show up in secret or confidential State Department and CIA dispatches from Iran. In May, John Stempel from the U.S. embassy in Iran met with a leader of the pro-Khomeini movement, Mohammad Tavakoli, who "asked if Stempel knew Professor Richard Cottam." According to a dispatch from Stempel, Tavakoli asked "if Stempel had some way of proving that he was a State Department officer and whether he would mind his name being checked with Professor Cottam."³⁶ A few weeks later, Stempel met Tavakoli with Bazargan, the leader of what was now called the National Liberation Movement, and Tavakoli—obviously referring to Cottam—curiously asked if the Carter administration has a "separate channel" into the embassy outside State Department channels. "He noted that the Movement had supplied much information to Richard Cottam when he was a State Department officer and continued to do so," wrote Stempel.³⁷ Cottam continued to make back-and-forth visits to Teheran and Paris, where he met Khomeini, Yazdi, and Ghotbzadeh. In June 1978, Charles Naas of the U.S. embassy wrote to Henry Precht, the Iran desk officer: "We find it fascinating that Richard Cottam, as several of us had thought, is still a principal contact for the [Liberation Movement] in the U.S., and they were willing to confirm this."³⁸ By December, when the revolution was clearly about to succeed, a confidential State Department dispatch from the embassy noted rumors that Cottam had secretly traveled to Teheran. "To the best of our knowledge, Cottam is not here. Would appreciate it if Department could discreetly confirm his presence in Pittsburgh."

But by then Cottam was seeking to establish overt connections between Yazdi, Ghotbzadeh, and others in the Khomeini circle with official Washington, outside State Department channels. Precht says that Cottam repeatedly tried to open a dialogue between Khomeini's circle and the U.S. government. In late 1978, says Precht, Cottam "said that Ibrahim Yazdi was coming to Washington, and that we ought to meet him. And he called Gary Sick at the NSC with the same idea. But Cottam was persona non grata at the State Department, because he had all those contacts with Iranian dissidents.... Sometimes, the people in the human rights office, under Steve Cohen, dealt with them." Eventually Precht and other State Department officials did open a dialogue with the revolutionaries, including Yazdi and Shahriar Rouhani, Yazdi's son-in-law. The meetings continued in Paris, and in Teheran Cottam introduced U.S. embassy officials to Ayatollah Beheshti, who was Khomeini's official representative in Iran in the months before the revolution. The Iranians assured the U.S. officials that Khomeini was not to be feared, and that he did not have political ambitions for himself.³⁹

A few months later, Khomeini had seized power, and he began to construct the institutions that would guarantee that power would remain in the hands of the clergy for the next quarter-century: the *komitehs*, or Islamic committees; the *pasdaran*, the guard; various bodies of Islamic "experts" and jurists; the Islamic courts; the revolutionary council. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of officials from the shah's era were summarily executed, and countless others were murdered by Khomeini's followers.

After the Revolution

The United States struggled to recover from the shock of the January-February 1979 revolution in Iran.

A major effort was made to establish something resembling normal diplomatic relations with the new regime in Teheran, but they got off to a bad start. "We wanted to establish a dialogue," says Walter Cutler, the veteran U.S. diplomat assigned to be America's ambassador to the Islamic Republic in the middle of 1979. "I was to go out there and try to establish some sort of rapport with

the new regime, from Khomeini on down."⁴⁰ Cutler had served in Iran as consul in Tabriz in the mid-1960s, and spent much of the 1980s as U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Named to succeed Bill Sullivan, the outgoing U.S. ambassador who was fatally tainted by his association with the shah, Cutler was asked to assemble an Iran team quickly. "My appointment was pretty rushed, and I had to put together a whole new team fast. [Secretary of State Cyrus] Vance said, 'Pick anyone you want, and I will break their assignment,'" meaning that Vance would reassign to Iran anyone Cutler wanted. What Cutler didn't know, of course, is that many of the people assigned to his team would be taken hostage in November and held for fifteen months under brutal conditions.

"We had to prove to the Iranians that we were not the Great Satan," says Cutler. The fact that the Iranian revolution was based on Islam, not left-wing nationalism, was something that encouraged many U.S. policy makers, diplomats, and CIA officials, from Zbigniew Brzezinski at the NSC on down. "We were in the Cold War," says Cutler, "and here was an Islamic revolution, and I'd been there long enough to know what suspicion existed about the Russians. I thought that we could handle the possibility that the Soviet Union might try to increase its influence, because of the strength of Islam. ... If you're looking for common interests, our shared concern about Soviet penetration of that part of the world was one."

But Cutler never reached Iran. A congressional resolution condemning Khomeini in 1979 infuriated the ayatollah, and, according to Cutler, Yazdi later told him that Khomeini wanted to break relations with the United States entirely. Instead Yazdi persuaded Khomeini to take just a "half step" and to refuse the ambassador. Cutler's appointment was withdrawn.⁴¹ But other U.S. officials, most of them fated to be taken captive in November, began arriving. Some, but not all, had served in Iran before but virtually none had any experience with or knowledge of Islamism.

Bruce Laingen, who headed the embassy in the absence of an ambassador, had two brief stints in Iran before but says frankly, "I am no expert on the subject of Islam." He was plucked from an assignment that would have taken him to Japan and hustled to Iran, because the State Department was "casting around for available, dispensable, transferable FSOs [foreign service officers]." Did he get a lot of preparation to deal with Islam and Khomeini's ideology? "No," he says. "Almost none."⁴² Thomas Ahern, the new CIA station chief, calls his appointment a "bureaucratic accident," and says that he received no help from the U.S. government that enabled him to understand the dynamic of Khomeini's Islamic movement. "You can quote me as saying that there was no instruction of an academic sort on the politics, culture, and economics of Iran," he says. "It was strictly a trade-school type of thing, preparing me to take over certain functions and certain contacts."⁴³ John Limbert, another veteran U.S. diplomat who spoke fluent Farsi, responded to a "volunteer cable, saying something like, 'We need people to go to Iran to help rebuild, or salvage something out of these events.' Naive as I was, I and many of my colleagues felt that now we could finally establish a healthy relationship with Iran." But did Limbert, Laingen, and their fellow officers understand Islam, or the nature of Khomeini's religious-right following? "We didn't know it," says Limbert. "We didn't understand it."⁴⁴ By November, Laingen, Ahern, Limbert, and scores of colleagues would be prisoners of a mob secretly directed by Khomeini.

The new Iranian government was a two-headed creature. There was the "official" government: Prime Minister Bazargan, Yazdi, Ghotbzadeh, and the man who would eventually be elected as the first president of the Islamic Republic, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr. Then there was the unofficial, parallel government, consisting of Khomeini, a handful of key ayatollahs, the *komitehs*, the *pasdaran*, and the hardcore set of Islamist institutions that were taking shape to implement Khomeini's theocracy. The new U.S. embassy team and visiting CIA and State Department officials were confined, for the most part, to interaction with the ever-less-powerful official government, while Khomeini kept the United States at arm's length. Khomeini embarked on a plan to isolate and destroy, one by one, all of the secular, left-wing, and moderate religious forces that had joined the anti-shah revolution in the 1970s. His ultimate goal was the consolidation of virtually all power under his personal control and in the Revolutionary Council, the shadowy body that was made up primarily of pro-Khomeini ayatollahs.

According to Laingen:

We had very little contact with the clergy. I never saw Khomeini. And we never really talked to the Revolutionary Council. We sensed they were there. We knew they were there. But we didn't appreciate how much power they really had. We saw our mission as to reiterate our acceptance of the Islamic revolution, and to communicate that we were a spiritual-minded country. That it was feasible for the United States to come to an understanding with political Islam, and that the shah had no future. We recognized that Khomeini would not be disestablished. But we were caught up in the belief that the secular side of the revolution would prevail. Bazargan, Yazdi, and Ghotbzadeh believed that they would be able to cope, that they would manage to contain Khomeini's influence.⁴⁵

Embassy officials did talk to a limited number of mostly more moderate Shiite clergy, but it didn't do much to open doors to Khomeini's inner circle. Many of the more cooperative Islamist mullahs were pushed aside, assassinated, or forced into exile as Khomeini consolidated power.

The embassy wasn't getting much help from the CIA, either, which failed to produce any intelligence estimates about the future of Iran in 1979. Says Ahern:

I don't recall any estimate or forecast of what would happen. What Washington wanted from the embassy as a whole was to be encouraging, supporting the Yazdis, the Bazargans, in hope of moderating, or helping them moderate the regressive tendencies of the regime. As I recall, this was all on the level of wistful hope, not on the level of serious planning or based on indications from Iranians that this was going to work.⁴⁶

But if the CIA wasn't producing many conclusions about the future of Iran, it was asked to pass on to Iran crucial intelligence about Iran's neighbor, Iraq. Yet less than a year later the two countries would be engaged in a bloody, decade-long conflict that reportedly left more than a million dead. Besides the CIA station chief, other senior CIA officials, including Robert Ames and George Cave, made visits to Iran in 1979, before the embassy takeover. On at least one occasion, Ames—who headed the CIA's Near East Division—met with Ayatollah Beheshti, and other agency officials met Yazdi, Amir Abbas Entezam, and other non-clergy Iranian officials. A system of intelligence sharing was established, particularly in connection with Iraq. "Once the Bazargan government was established, we tried to do business with them," recalls a CIA official involved with Iran at the time, adding that the CIA warned Iran in 1979 about Iraqi war intentions.⁴⁷ Laingen confirms reports that the United States passed on intelligence to Iran about Iraq:

We had concern over Iraq. Relations between Iran and Iraq were close to their lowest point, and Khomeini had enormous distaste for Saddam Hussein. He had a desire to export the revolution to Iraq. Iraq was certainly a major target. I recall briefing the Iranians on American intelligence on Iraq. We gave them information about Iraq's military capacity, troop emplacements, intentions. It was a new experience for me, suddenly being involved in the intelligence side of diplomacy.⁴⁸

While the United States passed on intelligence to the mullahs, including Beheshti, it gradually became clear that the Bazargans, Yazdis, and Ghotbzadehs had virtually no power, and that the Shiite clergy controlled everything. That was especially true in connection with the military, "There was no coordination between Bazargan and the military. I know this for a fact," says a former CIA official. "The military was under the ironclad control of the mullahs. And the mullahs divided Iran into seventeen villages, and assigned people to run each one, through the *komitehs*"⁴⁹

Even so, a handful of U.S. policy makers began to see Iran's Islamist orientation as threatening to the USSR. One of the most surprising to reach that conclusion was Brzezinski, the hard-line national security adviser who'd been an advocate for using a military coup in Iran to stop Khomeini's revolution. Gradually, Brzezinski changed his mind, envisioning what he called an "arc of crisis" stretching from northeast Africa to central Asia. It was a high-stakes zone of conflict between the two superpowers, and it subsumed a region entirely imbued with the Islamic resurgence. Henry Precht, who had been one of the U.S. officials most opposed to the shah and

who favored trying to establish good relations with the Islamic Republic, recalls the situation in the middle of 1979:

After the revolution, we still considered Iran to be terribly important to U.S. interests. At one point Hal Saunders [assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs] went to the White House for a meeting, and when he came back he told me, "You'll be very pleased. We're going to try to develop new relations with Iran." There was this idea that the Islamic forces could be used against the Soviet Union. The theory was, there was an arc of crisis, and so an arc of Islam could be mobilized to contain the Soviets. It was a Brzezinski concept.⁵⁰

Brzezinski, in his memoirs, says that he began to press for an all-encompassing U.S. security policy along the arc of crisis even before the Iranian revolution had run its course. By that, he meant strong U.S. military ties to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Turkey, four Muslim countries inside the arc, flanking U.S. support in Oman, Somalia, and Kenya, and U.S. bases in several countries and in the Indian Ocean. "By late 1978," wrote Brzezinski, "I began to press the 'arc of crisis' thesis, [arguing] for a new 'security framework' to reassert U.S. power and influence in the region."⁵¹

Brzezinski saw the loss of the shah as "catastrophic," according to Cottam. At first Brzezinski wanted an Iranian Pinochet, a military dictator who would suppress the Islamic revolution at any cost, but when that became impossible Brzezinski opted for a "de facto alliance with the forces of Islamic resurgence and with the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran," wrote Cottam. "Stability was not even implicitly his objective. His primary concern was to form an effective anti-Soviet alliance in the region he described as an 'arc of crisis.' By the summer of 1979 Brzezinski was convinced of the sincerity of Khomeini's fierce anti-communism."⁵²

A few months later, in pursuit of that dream, Brzezinski met in Algiers with Prime Minister Bazargan, Foreign Minister Yazdi, and Defense Minister Mustafa Chamran. The timing, however, could not have been worse. Weeks earlier, the Carter administration had allowed the dying shah, stricken with cancer, to come to New York for medical care. It was a move that inflamed Khomeini's most radical followers, and Khomeini seized on it to move against the Bazargan-Yazdi faction in the Iranian government, just three days after the Brzezinski-Bazargan encounter in Algiers. What seemed at the time to be a spontaneously assembled mob of students invaded the grounds of U.S. embassy in Teheran, and one of the most significant diplomatic crises in U.S. history was launched. With its diplomats captive, there was no possibility for dialogue between the United States and Iran. The Iranian government maintained the polite fiction that the hostage takers were simply militant "students," but there is no doubt that the entire action was carefully orchestrated by Khomeini and his inner circle as a means of consolidating the political power of the unofficial, parallel government that had been growing in strength alongside the official one. Vladimir Kuzichkin, the KGB station chief in Teheran who defected to the West a few years later, had direct information on who organized the terrorist operation. "We knew from our sources who it was who sanctioned and then carried out the seizure of the embassy," wrote Kuzichkin. "The seizure was sanctioned at the very summit of the Iranian leadership, and was carried out by a trained team that consisted exclusively of members of the Corps of Revolutionary Guards."⁵³

The Carter administration had not the slightest clue about how to deal with Khomeini after the embassy takeover. Countless books, memoirs, and scholarly papers have been written about the hostage crisis. But nothing sums up the futility of Carter's efforts better than a passage from the memoir of Hamilton Jordan, the president's chief of staff, who had a lead responsibility for resolving the standoff. Jordan describes seeing Carter at his desk, writing:

"See me later if you don't mind—I'm writing a letter to Khomeini." I was amused at the idea of the Southern Baptist writing to the Moslem fanatic. What will he say to the man? I thought. Maybe he'll sign the letter "The Great Satan." . . ."If Khomeini is the religious leader he purports to be," Carter said, "I don't see how he can condone the holding of our people."⁵⁴

It was the beginning of the end of the Carter administration, too. The seizure of the U.S. embassy created a sustained crisis that President Carter could not extricate himself from—not by negotiations, not by threats, not by a bungled military rescue mission. Although Teheran engaged several times, often using dubious middlemen, in talks with Washington, it was clear that Khomeini had an internal political agenda that precluded the release of the hostages until he was ready. "In January 1980," says Harold Saunders, "a prominent Islamic statesman said: 'You won't get the hostages back until Khomeini puts in place all the elements of his Islamic republic.'"

That proved to be the case.

The revolution in Iran changed everything. For Washington, it eliminated a reliable ally, listening post, and base of operations. For the other big player in the Cold War, the revolution in Iran was perhaps even more alarming. Despite the shah's open alliance with the United States, the Soviet Union had grown comfortable dealing with Iran on terms that, more often than not, were marked by the kind of respect that two neighboring powers give each other. In economic relations, in particular, the USSR and Iran got along well. More important, Iran's stability meant that Moscow did not have to worry about instability or irredentism on its flank in southwest Asia. Now, all bets were off. For the first time since the 1920s, the Soviet Union started to worry about Islam. And the United States was planning to make sure it had something to worry about.

Chapter 12

Clash of Civilizations?

The Cold War ended in 1991. But, if the Cold War was World War III, does that mean, as some conservatives argue, that the United States is now engaged in World War IV, this time against Islam? Is Islamic fundamentalism the "new communism"? Is the war on terrorism the twenty-first-century equivalent of the global struggle against the Soviet Union? How serious, really, is the threat of Islamist terrorism? And how—if at all—did America's relationship to political Islam change with the end of the Cold War?

The central theme of this book is that the Islamic right was seen as a valuable U.S. ally during the Cold War. Was that alliance superseded, or rendered superfluous, by the disappearance of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry? With the elimination of its communist enemy, did the Islamic right direct its wrath instead toward the Great Satans of the secular West? Is the United States now facing a worldwide enemy, comprising a hydra-headed monster tied to a network of states—Iran, Syria, Libya, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia—that Michael Ledeen, the Iran-contra veteran, calls the "terror masters"?

Since September 11, 2001, the notion that the United States and the Muslim world are on a collision course has gained credence. If the first Iraq war in 1991 marked the start of the short-lived New World Order, does the second Iraq war in 2003 symbolize an entirely different era: the Clash of Civilizations? Proponents of this view—popularized by Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington—see President Bush's war on terrorism not as a struggle against Al Qaeda and its radical allies, but as a titanic struggle pitting Judeo-Christian civilization against the Muslim world. Fittingly, in the Pentagon, the Global War on Terrorism is known by its acronym, G-WOT, pronounced "gee what," thus neatly rhyming with "jihad."

Leading neoconservatives, such as James Woolsey, the former CIA director and *Commentary's* Norman Podhoretz proclaimed that the struggle against Islam was indeed World War IV. Joined by key Bush administration officials, they compared the power of the Islamic right—and sometimes, the religion of Islam itself—to that of fascism or communism. It was, they said, a globe-spanning opponent whose existence threatened America's survival, and because of it, previously unthinkable steps had to be taken. To fight World War IV would require a new U.S. doctrine of unilateral, preventive wars, an offensive posture that included wars against Afghanistan, Iraq, and then other nations, and vast increases in U.S. military and intelligence budgets. It would mean the creation of a surveillance state at home, with the Department of Homeland Security, the USA Patriot Act, the Pentagon's Northern Command for deploying the armed forces inside the

United States, and new Justice Department rules giving the FBI, the police, and Joint Terrorism Task Forces in fifty-three U.S. cities significant new authority.

On closer examination, however, the clash of civilizations, the war on terror, and the Bush administration campaign to reshape the Middle East were rife with paradoxes, contradictions, and outright lies.

The enemy that attacked the United States on September 11 was not Islam, nor was it Islamic fundamentalism, nor was it the Muslim Brotherhood, Hezbollah, Hamas, or any other group of violence-prone militants on the Islamic right. Rather, it was Al Qaeda. Osama bin Laden's organization is not a global power, and it does not pose an existential threat to the United States. It is a group of fanatics with a tightly disciplined command structure demanding mafia-style, blood-oath loyalties. Its attack on New York and Washington in 2001 outraged the entire world, and an effective counterattack—using intelligence, legal action, political and diplomatic pressure, and highly selective military strikes—could have weakened and then destroyed it. Unquestionably, the destruction of Al Qaeda could have been accomplished without a war in Afghanistan, without a war in Iraq, and without a "war on terrorism."

But the Bush administration deliberately inflated the specific threat from Al Qaeda itself. Certainly, bin Laden's group has proved itself capable of inflicting severe damage. Since 9/11, it has struck targets in Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey, and elsewhere. Despite Attorney General Ashcroft's unsubstantiated claim in 2001 that thousands of Al Qaeda operatives had infiltrated the United States, however, in the almost four years after 9/11 not a single violent act by Al Qaeda occurred in America. And there is no shred of evidence that Al Qaeda has acquired or is about to acquire any nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons. In short, while bin Laden can launch terrorist strikes, and may do so again, the actual threat that Al Qaeda poses is circumscribed and manageable. Many other nations, including Israel, Ireland, and Italy, have weathered far more serious terrorist threats over many years.

Equally, neither Al Qaeda, nor its ideological comrades, nor the Islamic right as a whole—nor, for that matter, the entire Muslim world—present the kind of challenge to America's global hegemony that the Soviet Union clearly did. No combination of Middle East states, most of which are weak, impoverished, and wracked by internal divisions, is able to mount a threat to the United States in a manner that would justify an enterprise called "World War IV." But by describing the Islamist threat in such an exaggerated way, the Bush administration and its neoconservative allies created a pretext for an imperial expansion of the U.S. presence in the greater Middle East, including Pakistan, Central Asia, and the eastern Mediterranean/Red Sea/Indian Ocean region. It is fair to ask if the virtual U.S. occupation of the Middle East is related to goals other than anti-terrorism. Is it because neoconservatives want to anchor U.S. global hegemony by planting the flag in that vital, but unstable region? Is it because as much as two-thirds of the world's oil is in Saudi Arabia and Iraq? Is it because the Bush administration has forged such intimate ties to Ariel Sharon and the Israeli right?

The notion that Islamist terrorism is really the U.S. government's target is contradicted by the targets of the Bush administration's Middle East policy. Why, if the enemy is Islamist terrorism, did the administration invest so much energy against Iraq, Syria, and the PLO? Both Syria's president, Bashar Assad, and the late chairman of the PLO, Yasser Arafat, were implacable opponents of the Muslim Brotherhood, but they found themselves added incongruously to the list of Al Qaeda's allies. By attacking Iraq, the Bush administration also found an inappropriate target. Since coming to power in 1968, Saddam Hussein was a determined enemy of the Islamists, from Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini to terrorist Shiite groups to Al Qaeda itself. The Arab Baath Socialist Party, in both its Iraqi and Syrian branches, is resolutely secular, and the Bush administration's efforts to link Iraq to Al Qaeda were ridiculed by the CIA and the State Department. In fact, in invading Iraq, President Bush made common cause with the Islamic right: before, during, and after the invasion, the United States supported the Iraqi National Congress exile coalition, in which two Shiite fundamentalist parties, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), and the Islamic Call (Al-Dawa), played prominent roles. Both SCIRI and Dawa had close ties to the Islamic Republic of Iran, and after the war, both worked closely with Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

Not only did the Bush administration pick the wrong targets, but its military-run war on terrorism is exactly the wrong way to reduce the appeal of the Islamic right. Putting Al Qaeda, Islamic Jihad, and similar terrorist groups to one side, the far broader constellation of right-wing Islamic groups, institutions, and political parties in the Muslim world does in fact represent a significant threat—not to U.S. national security but to governments, intellectuals, progressives, and other freethinkers in the swath of nations from Morocco to Indonesia. From Algeria's FIS to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood to the Palestinian Hamas to Iraq's Shiite fundamentalists to Pakistan's Islamic Group, together with the support of ultra-orthodox Wahhabi clerics in Saudi Arabia, organizations such as the Muslim World League, and the Islamic banks, there is indeed a threat to the Middle East. It is, however, a threat that cannot be dealt with by military means. Indeed, it will get worse in precise proportion to the intrusiveness of the U.S. political, military, and economic presence in the region. Only by rapidly withdrawing from Afghanistan and Iraq, by reducing America's overweening presence in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, and by reversing U.S. support for Israel's aggressive opposition to Palestinian nationalism can the United States undercut the anger, frustration, and resentment that fuels Islamism.

Reducing America's footprint in the Middle East is the polar opposite of the Bush administration's policy, however. Cynically perhaps, the administration has wielded the idea of a broad struggle against terrorism to pursue a policy aimed at redrawing the entire map of the Middle East. The radical, or "idealist" neoconservatives, from administration officials to armchair strategists at think tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute, the Hudson Institute, and the Project for a New American Century, announced that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were just the first two salvos in a sweeping plan to seize control of Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states. Even the more mainstream Bush administration officials, while eschewing some of the neoconservatives' visions, support the idea of a greater U.S. military presence in the region from North Africa to Indonesia.

Astute critics of the Bush administration's military-based anti-terrorism policies and imperial pretensions have argued that it is a strategy guaranteed to backfire, and one that seems designed to create more terrorists than it kills. Anger against the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan is likely to draw new jihadists into battle in those two countries, and the conflict could spread into both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, where conservative, Islam-oriented governments could fall to far more radical dissident groups associated with bin Laden, the mujahideen, the Taliban, and a Wahhabi extremist underground.

A second prong of the Bush administration's Middle East policy is likely to prove equally counterproductive, namely, its vaunted call for democratic reform.

The administration's support for democracy in the region is, on the surface at least, a stunning about-face. For years, especially during the Cold War, the United States propped up dictators, kings, emirs, and presidents-for-life in the Middle East and around the world. In the Arab world—in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, and the Gulf—many of these autocrats ruled in part by forging an alliance with the Islamic right, with the support of U.S. policy makers. Throughout these years, opposition to the region's kleptocracies and right-wing regimes came exclusively from the left—from American liberals, from the European left, from the Soviet Union. Certainly, the elimination of dictatorships and the establishment of fledgling democracies in the Arab world, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Muslim Africa ought to be a valued goal.

But the Bush administration's version of democratic reform is suspect.

First, it is opportunistic. Much of the momentum for the Bush administration's emphasis on Arab democracy came only when the 2003 invasion of Iraq belied the White House's stated objectives in launching the war: to find Saddam's weapons of mass destruction and to uncover Iraq's supposed ties to Al Qaeda. When those two rationales proved to be fictional, President Bush shifted to a new one—that America's *raison de la guerre* was to bring democracy to Iraq.

Second, the Bush administration cynically distinguishes between pro-American dictatorships in the Middle East and anti-American ones, concentrating its pressure for democracy on the latter. In the context of the Bush administration's imperial Middle East policy, its call for imposing democracy can only be seen as a spearhead for intensified U.S. political and military involvement in the

region. True democracies in the oil-producing countries would pursue bold, nationalist initiatives that are almost guaranteed to run afoul of the Bush administration's long-range plans for the region. Only the naive believe that the United States, in pursuing a "regime change" strategy in a part of the world that contains two-thirds of the world's oil, desires the emergence of governments that might resist U.S. regional hegemony. Certainly, the Bush administration does not favor the development of Arab or Iranian democracies that would forge closer ties with, say, Russia or China at American expense. Instead, its calls for democratic change in the Middle East allow the Bush administration to apply greater or less pressure selectively on governments in the region in order to achieve particular U.S. national security goals.

Thus, Syria is now squeezed between Israel and U.S.-occupied Iraq, and Iran is positioned between Iraq and NATO-occupied Afghanistan. Since 2001, the United States has achieved a position of unparalleled supremacy in the region. The neoconservatives who argued successfully for war in Iraq want nothing more than a calibrated American effort toward forcible regime change in Syria and Iran, in order to create a block of new states in combination with Israel, Turkey, and Pakistan—but organized and managed under U.S. tutelage.

And what about the pro-American autocracies such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt? To the extent that President Bush extends his pressure for imperial democracy beyond Iraq, Syria, Iran, and the PLO to the pro-Western governments in the region, the effort must be taken with a grain of salt. Because it is comprised of constituencies with differing perspectives, the administration has sent mixed signals in regard to its two most important Arab allies. Mainstream U.S. policy makers, officials at the CIA and the State Department, and their allies with vested interests in the region—the oil companies, banks, and defense contractors—want the Bush administration to go slow on pressing Cairo and Riyadh for change. Others, more ideological, seem to exhibit the messianic belief that the experiment in Iraq must be forcibly replicated in both Egypt and Saudi Arabia. And some radical neoconservatives, such as Richard Perle and Michael Ledeen, roughly lump Saudi Arabia with Syria and Iran as a supporter of Al Qaeda and demand that Riyadh be added to the president's axis-of-evil enemies' list. All of them overlook the fact that both Egypt and Saudi Arabia have been under both internal and external pressure to liberalize their regimes for decades, and from time to time both have experimented, cautiously, with democratic reform—only to pull back. The need for delicacy in dealing with these two countries often escapes the Bush administration's more ideological partisans.

But in the context of examining U.S. policy toward the Islamic right, the twin cases of Egypt and Saudi Arabia are fraught with dangerous possibilities. Pressing too hard for liberalization in either country could result in bringing the Islamic right to power in both Cairo and Riyadh.

As during the Cold War, however, when the United States preferred Islamism to Arab nationalism, the Bush administration and its neoconservative allies have sometimes expressed their preference for the Islamic right, too. If forced to choose between regimes in Egypt and Saudi Arabia led by left-leaning Arab nationalists or right-leaning Islamists, Washington will pick the Islamists every time. Despite their rhetoric about a clash of civilizations, the Bush administration has not been averse to seeking allies among the Islamic right. In Iraq, the Bush administration after the war found itself in a partnership with Ayatollah Sistani, two Iranian-connected parties, and the forces of organized Shiite fundamentalism. Leading neoconservatives also supported the Shiite right elsewhere, including in Saudi Arabia, where they went beyond calls for democratic reform to demand the breakup of Saudi Arabia and the creation of a Shiite state in Saudi Arabia's eastern province, where Shiites comprise a majority. In Gaza and the West Bank, Ariel Sharon continued to toy with using Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah to undercut the PLO, and in 2005 Hamas emerged as the most powerful electoral force in Gaza. It seems that even those who issue the most dire warnings about a titanic, Islam-vs.-Christianity struggle readily manage to find accommodation with right-wing Islamists.

Still, for purposes of public relations, the Bush administration has been content to allow its Middle East policy to be portrayed as a clash of civilizations. Some of its allies, especially members of the Christian right, explicitly disparage Islam as an evil and violent religion. Proclaiming that Islamic fundamentalists and bin Laden "hate our freedoms," rather than U.S. policies, Bush has

framed the war on terrorism in the starkest terms, as a showdown between a God-fearing America and an "axis of evil." Despite the paradoxes of the war on terror, it is safe to say that millions of Americans have been sold on the idea that the Christian and Muslim worlds must battle each other to the end.

What happened between 1991 and 2001 to transform Islam from an ally to a malignant evil?

The easy answer is blame the shock that followed Al Qaeda's 2001 attacks. But 9/11 was preceded by a decade of confusion in the United States. To follow the transition from the New World Order to the clash of civilizations, it is necessary to touch on the three crises of political Islam during the nineties: Algeria, Egypt, and the rise of the Taliban. The twelve years from the first Iraq war to the second was a period of dizzying change for the Middle East. In Algeria, the Islamic right plunged the country into a brutal civil war when it was denied the fruits of an electoral victory in 1991. In Egypt, a terrorist underground, discreetly supported by the Muslim Brotherhood establishment, nearly toppled Mubarak in the mid-1990s. And then, in Afghanistan, the Pakistan-backed Taliban movement seized Kabul and imposed the world's strictest theocracy.

During these crises, the administrations of George Bush and Bill Clinton failed to develop a coherent policy toward political Islam. Even though the Muslim Brotherhood and right-wing political Islam had seized control of Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sudan—and threatened Algeria, Egypt, Syria, and the Palestinian Authority—neither Bush nor Clinton grasped the implications. The U.S. intelligence system and its vaunted counterterrorism machinery first missed the rise of Al Qaeda and then, when the organization made its presence known with a series of spectacular attacks in the late 1990s, failed to stop it. Had they responded differently, had they realized the significance of the Islamist movement then, and had U.S. intelligence analysts and operatives more carefully tracked the violent offshoots of the Brotherhood and the Taliban, perhaps the events of 2001 and beyond would not have occurred. Certainly, had the United States mapped out a coherent policy toward Islamism during the 1990s, the dangerous notion that America is facing a clash of civilizations would never have gained traction.

The U.S. government, academia, and the world of policy-oriented think tanks were divided over how to respond to the Islamic resurgence at the end of the Cold War. Some wanted to develop a comprehensive policy toward Islamism, others demanded that it be treated on a country-by-country basis. Some wanted to confront the Islamists, others to co-opt or placate them. Pragmatists believed that U.S. policy ought to stick with support for the existing regimes in Cairo, Amman, Algiers, and elsewhere, but idealists supported the idea that democracy had to flower in the region, even if the Islamists were positioned to win elections. In the decade between 1991 and 2001, U.S. policy toward the Islamic right was confused and contradictory. When not ignoring it, everyone agreed that Islamist terrorism was bad, but that's where the agreement stopped. The end of the U.S.-Soviet struggle in the Middle East left the United States facing a region in which political Islam was a major player. The Islamic right covered a spectrum from the conservative Islamist regimes in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, to the radical regimes in Iran and Sudan, to extra-governmental organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the Taliban and Hezbollah, to radical-right terrorist cells such as Al Qaeda. Some were allies, some were vaguely threatening, some dangerously hostile. But how to tell friend from foe?

Three Crises in the 1990s

During the 1990s, the United States dealt uncertainly with flare-ups by the Islamic right, first in Algeria, then in Egypt, and finally, once again, in Afghanistan. In all three cases, the Islamists were able to draw on battle-hardened veterans of the U.S.-sponsored Afghan jihad, who applied the skills acquired in that war—including bomb-making, assassinations, and guerrilla-style attacks—in their struggle. As the Soviet Union melted away, the Islamic right began to emerge as a threat to stability, security, and U.S. interests. "One year after Muslim rebels ousted the communist government in Afghanistan, the long Afghanistan war reverberates throughout the Islamic world, as veterans of the conflict take up arms to try to topple governments in Algeria, Egypt, and other Arab countries," the *New York Times* reported in 1993. "Western diplomats and Arab officials say

thousands of Islamic militants engaging in clandestine, violent campaigns to overthrow governments in Algeria, Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, Jordan, Turkey and other predominantly Muslim states currently use Afghanistan as a base."¹ Imbued with a new consciousness and the belief that their insurgency had defeated a superpower in Afghanistan, the Islamic right tested the limits of its newfound power.

Algeria

The 1991-99 crisis in Algeria triggered the first government-wide review of U.S. policy toward political Islam since the Iranian revolution. And, during the seven-year civil war in Algeria, U.S. policy was pulled this way and that by contradictory views—amid charges in Paris and elsewhere in Europe that Washington was cozying up to the Algerian Islamists in order to advance its own oil, gas, and industrial interests in North Africa, at Europe's expense.

The conundrum for the United States in Algeria was having to choose between an Islamist insurgency that had gained an electoral advantage and an entrenched, military-dominated but secular regime that then suspended democracy in order to block the Islamists' victory. The issue was not whether the United States should intervene directly—neither side in Algeria wanted that, and it was impractical in any case. But Washington had to choose between affirming its support for Algeria's experiment in democracy, thus aligning it with a radical Islamist movement, or siding with the Algerian army. Though Washington looked for a middle ground, in the end, correctly, it tolerated the army's suppression of the Islamists. It was not an entirely happy outcome. Yet had the United States condemned the Algerian regime and thrown its diplomatic support to the Islamic right, the consequences—in Algeria, and across the region—could have been catastrophic.

The usual version of the Algerian crisis starts in 1989, with the establishment of the Islamic Salvation Front, known by its French abbreviation, FIS. In June 1990, the FIS won a resounding victory in local elections. Then, in December 1991, FIS stunned the ruling party, the National Liberation Front (FLN), winning 118 parliamentary seats to the FLN's 16. But before the second round of the vote, and before the FIS took power, the army intervened to annul the vote, arresting 10,000 FIS members and supporters. Denied its victory, the FIS unleashed a campaign of terrorism. The president of Algeria was assassinated, ministries were bombed, and hundreds of security officials and policemen were killed by FIS gunmen. Civil war began.

During the decade, a second organization called the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) emerged, with a murky relationship to FIS. As the violence intensified, Islamist vigilantes and shadowy paramilitary groups carried out a campaign of horrifying slaughter, decimating villages, massacring women and children. Tens of thousands died.²

But the FIS did not emerge suddenly in 1989. As happened in Pakistan, Egypt, Syria, Sudan, and Afghanistan during the Cold War, the Islamic right built its power by battling the left and Algerian nationalists, especially on campuses. As in Afghanistan, where "the professors" tied to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood built a secret society of Islamists in Kabul in the 1960s and 1970s, in Algeria a host of professors and teachers from Egypt, many of whom were members of the Muslim Brotherhood and who had studied in Saudi Arabia's Islamic universities, were imported to teach Arabic to the francophone Algerians. Mohammed al-Ghazali and Yusuf al-Qaradawi, two of Egypt's leading Islamic scholars who had fled to the Gulf, and who "were fellow travelers of the Muslim Brothers and very much in favor with the oil monarchies [and who encouraged] the 'Islamic awakening' at work" in Algeria in the mid-1980s.³ Throughout the 1980s, this cadre of Islamic-right activists carried out a series of terrorist attacks against the Algerian government. Many of the terrorists involved had been to Afghanistan, or traveled back and forth to the jihad, and one of them, Abdallah Anas, joined forces with bin Laden and Azzam in the pre-Al Qaeda "Services Bureau." When Azzam was assassinated, Anas took over.

By the time the FIS was created, it had seized control of thousands of mosques across the country and built a political-religious machine. Like the Taliban, wherever FIS controlled municipal or provincial governments it instituted its version of Islamic cultural restrictions, forcing women to wear the veil, closing liquor and video stores, and often persecuting those who did not go along.

The FIS denounced Algeria's educated, secular middle classes and announced its intent to "ban France from Algeria intellectually and ideologically."⁴ One month before the December election that catapulted the FIS to victory, in November 1991, a supposedly independent or renegade band of Algeria's Islamists shocked the country with an outrageous act of terror:

Their first spectacular operation was a bloody assault on a frontier post, in the course of which a group of "Afghan" veterans cut off the heads of some wretched army conscripts.... The date was carefully chosen to celebrate within four days the second anniversary of the martyrdom of Abdullah Azzam in Peshawar. It marked the beginning of a jihad on Algerian soil.⁵

Many Algerians feared that an Islamist government would institute a reign of terror. Arab governments, including Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco, were alarmed, fearing that an Islamist-run Algeria would be infectious. And for the United States, the Algerian army's action posed a delicate political problem: would Washington endorse the army's suppression of the election results, or defend the FIS and the Islamic right?

For the Bush administration, preoccupied with the New World Order, it was a puzzle. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker were uneasy about the prospect of Islamism in Algeria, and they sided semiofficially with the Algerian army, adopting a position that a Senate report called "something of a wink and a nod."⁶ Baker, explaining his position later, said: "When I was at the State Department, we pursued a policy of excluding the radical fundamentalists in Algeria even as we recognized that this was somewhat at odds with our support of democracy."⁷ But many other U.S. officials, including CIA officers who had contact with the FIS, did not agree with the Bush-Baker policy.

According to Robert Pelletreau, a former U.S. ambassador and senior official at the State Department, there was serious disagreement about the Bush-Baker policy of blocking the Islamists in Algeria. "In the immediate aftermath of the military's decision to block the election result, we were very critical," says Pelletreau. "Twenty-four hours later, we reversed ourselves, and took a much more nuanced view."⁸

The Bush administration, uncertain about how to deal with the Islamist challenge in Algiers, undertook a policy review. But it was a hodgepodge, an effort to forge a consensus about how to deal with a phenomenon little understood even by experts and about which politicians, top administration officials, and members of Congress were utterly ignorant. Battle lines had not yet hardened, but at least two currents had already started to emerge. One was an accommodationist point of view, whose adherents argued that the United States had nothing to fear from the Islamic right and that U.S. diplomats and CIA officials ought to begin a worldwide effort to open contacts with the Islamists who were willing, for the sake of dialogue, to eschew violence. A second (still nascent) point of view was the clash-of-civilizations school, which believed that the Muslim world was unalterably and fundamentally hostile to the West. According to them, the enemy of the United States was not just Al Qaeda, and not even right-wing political Islam, but the very nature of the Muslim faith, the Koran, and Islamic civilization as it had evolved over thirteen centuries. Throughout the 1990s, these two schools would gain momentum and confront each other. Two leading academics would come to represent the two sides: for the accommodationists, John Esposito of Georgetown University; and for the clash of civilizations, Bernard Lewis of Princeton University.

In 1992., a decision was taken to have Edward Djerejian, then assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs, spearhead the effort to invent a policy toward Islam, and he was chosen to deliver a speech in June 1992, at Meridian House in Washington. "The State Department came to me and said, 'We need an Islam policy,'" says David Mack, then Djerejian's deputy. According to Mack, the speech was partly designed to counter administration officials who were starting to argue that the United States should treat Islam as a new global enemy. "Some of the folks, especially Richard Schifter of the bureau of human rights, were saying that Islam was dangerous, and of course this was the time when the thesis of the clash of civilizations was starting to surface,"

says Mack. "Well, we pretty much managed to head it off. We had a big, in-house conference, with people from [Near East affairs], [the Bureau of Intelligence and Research], human rights, and a lot of outside experts on Islam. And I drafted a speech for Djerejian. We brought it to Jim Baker, who said, 'Okay, fine, if you want to do this.'"⁹

Schifter, the assistant secretary of state for human rights, says that he adheres to Jeanne Kirkpatrick's distinction between "authoritarian" and "totalitarian" regimes. In the Algerian crisis, he says that he supported the view that the United States ought to back the Algerian army's suppression of the Islamists. But for Schifter, and for many hard-liners and neoconservatives, the issue was much larger than Algeria. "What I saw was the development of a movement similar to communism," he says. "It's the third totalitarian attack on democracy, after fascism and communism."¹⁰ According to Mack, Schifter wanted a much tougher line in the speech than was adopted. "Schifter and the bureau of human rights felt it was a soft-minded approach," says Mack.¹¹

In the end, Djerejian's speech laid down some important markers, but it also avoided crucial questions. Djerejian rejected out of hand the clash-of-civilizations idea. "The U.S. government does not view Islam as the new 'ism' confronting the West or threatening world peace," he said. "The Cold War is not being replaced with a new competition between Islam and the West. The Crusades have been over for a long time. Americans recognize Islam as a historic civilizing force among the many that have influenced and enriched our culture." But he went further:

Much attention is being paid to a phenomenon variously labeled political Islam, the Islamic revival, or Islamic fundamentalism... . In countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa, we thus see groups or movements seeking to reform their societies in keeping with Islamic ideals. ... We detect no monolithic or coordinated international effort behind these movements. What we do see are believers living in different countries placing renewed emphasis on Islamic principles and governments accommodating Islamist political activity to varying degrees and in different ways.

Djerejian went on to add that the United States wanted free elections and enhanced civil rights in the region, but said, in an obvious reference to the crisis in Algeria: "We are suspect of those who would use the democratic process to come to power, only to destroy that very process in order to retain power and political dominance." And he said that the United States was opposed to those who engage in violence, repression, or "religious and political confrontation."¹²

In other forums, Djerejian spoke favorably, but vaguely, about "moderate Islamists," although he failed to define what he meant by "moderate."¹³ While Djerejian condemned terrorism and noted that the United States has good relations with countries "whose systems of government are firmly grounded in Islamic principles," such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, he completely avoided any discussion of the Islamic right itself and its manifestations. "Unfortunately," Gerges wrote, "the Meridian address did not clarify the Bush administration's approach toward those very Islamist groups."

If Djerejian's speech failed as an outline of American policy toward political Islam, it worked well as a more particular response to events in Algeria, where the United States tacitly supported the army's suspension of democracy. But the situation went from bad to worse, as Algeria was engulfed in a cycle of violent attacks and counterattacks pitting the army against battle-hardened jihad veterans.

In 1993, the Clinton administration tried to encourage a dialogue between the Algerian authorities and elements of the Islamist opposition. But Western Europe, particularly France, accused the United States of using its dialogue with the Algerian Islamists to secure a political and commercial advantage in Algeria in the wake of what many expected would be an Islamic revolution. "The French attacked American motives for meeting with Islamists, suspecting the U.S. government of favoring the FIS over the Algerian regime," according to Gerges, who reports that Charles Pasqua, the French interior minister, accused Washington of harboring "fundamentalist terrorists."¹⁴ That was a reference to Anwar Haddam, the FIS representative in Washington, who maintained on-and-off contacts with U.S. officials in the early 1990s. "The French wanted us to

expel the FIS guy here," says Pelletreau, who served under Clinton as assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs. "But we never had any call to expel him."¹⁵

The loudest voice calling for a reconciliation with Algeria's Islamists was none other than Graham Fuller, the former CIA analyst who had worked with Casey to build a justification for the 1984-86 Iran-contra approach to Teheran. Then ensconced at the RAND Corporation, Fuller wrote a book entitled *Algeria: The Next Fundamentalist State?* In it, he virtually endorsed FIS as Algeria's next rulers and urged the United States not to worry. "The FIS is unlikely to present a massive challenge to U.S. and Western interests," wrote Fuller. "Is the United States willing to inaugurate democratic processes in which the Islamists stand a very good chance of gaining a significant voice in power?"¹⁶ Fuller admitted that FIS would suppress women's rights and spread the gospel abroad, "emboldening other Islamist movements in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco [with] asylum, financial aid, even weapons."¹⁷ But he argued that its momentum was unstoppable. "It will be very difficult, if not almost impossible, to stop Islamist forces," said Fuller. "Islamist governments in the Middle East are likely to multiply in the years ahead, taking numerous different forms. They, and the West, are going to have to learn to live with each other."¹⁸ Fuller argued that FIS "is likely to welcome U.S. private sector investment in Algeria and to undertake close commercial relations with the United States. . . . The FIS has long had good ties with Saudi Arabia and received a great deal of Saudi funding until recent years."¹⁹ Fuller's monograph was written for and sponsored by the U.S. Army.

To Fuller, the FIS movement in Algeria was a grand experiment, and one that the United States ought not to turn away from—and his views were certainly influential during the Clinton administration. But many Algerians, especially veterans of the revolution that ended in 1992, were not so ready to abandon secularism and socialism for free-market Islamism. "It's fine for others to talk about conducting a grand political experiment in Algeria," said Maloud Brahimi, former head of Algeria's League of Human Rights. "But what do we look like—white rats?"²⁰

Egypt

On the heels of the Algerian explosion, a dire Islamist threat to Egypt emerged in the 1990s, creating another dilemma for the Clinton administration. Was Egypt, the original home of the Muslim Brotherhood, about to fall to an Islamist revolution? And if so, what should U.S. policy be? The Bush administration's 1992 review, and the task force that Djerejian created, did not provide much guidance. Unlike Algeria, which after all was on the periphery of the Middle East, Egypt was its very heart—and President Mubarak a staunch ally. In the 1990s, Egyptian Islamists waged an assault on the Egyptian regime strong enough to threaten the country's stability. Hundreds of people were killed by armed militants, including military and police officers, government officials, and leading Egyptian writers and intellectuals. Despite heavy repression after the death of Sadat in 1981, and periodic crackdowns in the 1980s, the Brotherhood had made steady gains, especially in civil society. The organization won control of many of Egypt's professional associations—doctors, lawyers, engineers, and, of course, student groups, its traditional stronghold. In 1993, the *Sunday Times* of London reported that the CIA issued a National Intelligence Estimate warning that "Islamic fundamentalist terrorists will continue to make gains across Egypt, leading to the eventual collapse of the Mubarak government."²¹

James Woolsey was the CIA director at the time. "We were very worried, and as I remember we offered Egypt whatever assistance we could reasonably provide," he says. "Generally speaking, there was a substantial amount of support in the U.S. government, certainly in the intelligence community, for Mubarak doing whatever he had to do to prevent an Islamist takeover."²² The United States provided security assistance to Egypt's police and intelligence service. "In Egypt we'd trained a Special Operations group among the Egyptian authorities, with the help of the CIA," says Edward W. Walker, the U.S. ambassador from 1994 to 1997. "They were used in cleaning up a few of these cells."²³

The truth, however, is that even though the United States cooperated with Egypt to a degree in combating Islamist terrorism in Egypt, that cooperation was far less than it ought to have been, for

several reasons. First, within the U.S. government, there was a persistent belief that the Muslim Brotherhood was a potentially useful partner in efforts to bring democracy to Egypt, and throughout the 1990s that belief undercut U.S. assistance to Egypt's security and intelligence agencies. Second, the Mubarak regime's often very heavy-handed repression of its opponents, including arrests of all manner of dissidents and the use of torture against prisoners, made the United States skittish about helping Cairo. Both Woolsey and Walker say that the United States had strong reservations about the harshness of Egyptian methods. "They were very aggressive, more aggressive than we were willing to support. Some of the people they seized were found shot with their hands tied," says Walker. "We had to stop the program."²⁴ And third, there was sharp disagreement among U.S. intelligence and diplomatic officials about the nature of the Brotherhood itself: Was the organization cooperating with the radical, openly terrorist subgroups like Al Gamaa or Islamic Jihad, whose leaders included Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden's future chief aide? Or was the Brotherhood a moderate, even establishment group whose rhetorical commitment to democracy could be relied upon?

For Mubarak, at least, the answer was provided by Algeria. The Egyptian leader watched in horror as that country plunged into civil war, and he vowed not to allow the Islamists in Egypt to gain enough strength to mount a frontal challenge to his regime. Beginning in the 1980s and continuing through September 11, 2001, Mubarak criticized the United States repeatedly for its failure to take action against the Islamic right in its bases in Western Europe and in the United States itself. Those included overt Muslim Brotherhood organizational units in London and Germany, Said Ramadan's Islamic Center in Geneva, New York-New Jersey cells such as the one affiliated with blind sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman, the ringleader of the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center, and other U.S.-based cells, mosques, and Islamic centers. Until 2001, no concerted U.S. effort to investigate these networks was undertaken.

"Neither Europe nor the United States were cooperating with Egypt, not until 9/11," says Abdel Moneim Said of the Al Ahram Center in Cairo:

Omar Abdel Rahman was being harbored in the United States, having escaped in between trials and going to Sudan. The United States was not cooperating. They'd say to us, "You are not a democracy, you are not making reforms." So they were creating a worldwide terrorist network, and we were practically on our own during this period. We wanted the United States to give these guys to us, to sabotage their propaganda networks, to sabotage their financial networks, to disturb their connection with the trouble spots in Afghanistan. We tried several times to get the United States involved, first in 1986, when President Mubarak called for an international conference on terrorism, announcing it at a meeting of the European parliament in Strasbourg. We knew a lot by then: that the international centers for this movement were in London, New Jersey, Frankfurt, with other centers in Hamburg, Geneva, Copenhagen. They were not at all sensitive to this in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s.²⁵

The two U.S. ambassadors to Egypt during this period had conflicting views about the Muslim Brotherhood. Walker, who served from 1994 to 1997, was skeptical of the Muslim Brotherhood and mostly sympathetic to Mubarak's crackdown. Pelletreau, who served in Cairo from 1991 to 1993, was more apt to see the Brotherhood in a favorable light—even if it attracted the attention of Egypt's intelligence service. "Ned [Walker] and I had different policies," says Pelletreau. "I felt we had to be talking to members of the Muslim Brotherhood. I did [talk to them]." Pelletreau's contacts with the Brotherhood angered Mubarak. "At one point I received a very strong message from the [Egyptian] government, demanding that I break off those contacts. I said that I would not. I didn't meet with them myself, but people from the political section did. We developed people as contacts who were inside the movement. But in Egypt you have to be very careful, because the Egyptians have a very, very effective counterintelligence capability."²⁶

Pelletreau recalls a visit to Washington by Mubarak in which the Egyptian president lost his temper over U.S. inaction:

Soon afterward, Mubarak came to Washington, and the secretary of state invited him to lunch. Warren Christopher asked Mubarak about the best way to deal with the Islamists. I'll never forget what happened next. Mubarak sat up sharply, rigidly. "This is not a new phenomenon in Egypt," he said, getting angry. "These people killed my predecessor!" Then he raised this huge fist, and he slammed it down on the table hard, and everything on the table jumped and rattled. Bang! "When they come out, we have to hit them!"²⁷

But Pelletreau says: "I told Mubarak that it was the right policy to crack down on terrorists, but not on the Muslim Brotherhood." The question of how to tell the difference was something that U.S. intelligence could not answer, according to U.S. diplomats and intelligence officers. The line between the overtly terrorist organizations and the more establishment Muslim Brotherhood was not a clear one. The Brotherhood ran clinics, social welfare centers, and mosques, had a powerful presence among professional groups, and set up a semiofficial political party.

According to Pelletreau and Walker, the link between the official Muslim Brotherhood and the underground terrorist cells was probably organized through independent mosques and Islamic centers in Egypt run by "emirs." They apparently maintained a membership in the Brotherhood, which was a secret society, while giving encouragement, support, and theological justification to the terrorists. "The Egyptians claimed that they discovered some links, and I guess you could say that the whole line became blurred between the Muslim Brotherhood and the armed groups," says Pelletreau. "A lot of independent emirs start popping up here and there, in various parts of Cairo and some of the clerics develop a group of followers. They don't usually engage in acts of violence themselves, but they can condone violence. Say, someone will come to them and say, 'Is it permitted to do such and such?' and they will say, 'Yes, according to Islam.'"

Walker, who followed Pelletreau, had a somewhat different view. "We'd realized it was a much bigger problem," he says. "We were very close to the Europeans in cooperating to roll up these threats. We created flow charts of how these groups interacted with each other. A lot of the leaders were in places like Italy and London, and we'd cooperate by intercepting communications back into Egypt, and then the Egyptians would roll them up." But, Walker says, Egypt was not satisfied with U.S. and European cooperation. "I can't count the number of times that Mubarak yelled at me about how the British were giving the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists safe haven," he says. "In Egypt, everybody seemed to see it as a problem, but they couldn't convince us."²⁸

Like Pelletreau, Walker maintained a relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. "When I was there in Egypt we engaged with members of the Muslim Brotherhood, as individuals, on the level of the embassy political counselor. But it was an illegal organization, so it was sensitive. The Muslim Brotherhood was more acquiescent than some of the other groups, such as Islamic Jihad. The Muslim Brotherhood had a lot of sympathy from some people in Washington, who held it should be accommodated," he says. "For many of those who support bringing democracy to the region, the Muslim Brotherhood was seen as a legitimate domestic opposition force." Walker, and some CIA officers, didn't agree. "Terrorism had two sources. One was the Palestinians, and one, the Muslim Brotherhood. They had a checkered history. One day you're friends, and then they try to assassinate you," Walker says. "Our intelligence people saw it as a kind of international fraternity of terrorists. Some specific mosques were involved. It is not a coherent organizational structure. But if someone comes along, they help them."²⁹

Mubarak repeatedly slammed the United States in public, too, especially after the Islamists mounted an assassination attempt against him in 1995, murdered several Egyptian government officials abroad, and bombed Egypt's embassies. To Americans who urged him to cooperate with moderate Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood, Mubarak dripped with scorn. "Who are the moderates?" he said. "Nobody has succeeded in defining them for me." He ridiculed the effectiveness of dialogue with the Islamists. "Dialogue with whom? It will be the dialogue of the deaf. We had a dialogue with them for fourteen years, and every time we engaged them, they became stronger. Dialogue is old-fashioned. The ones who are asking for dialogue do not know [Islamists]. We know them better."³⁰

The shadow of Iran's 1979 revolution haunted Mubarak. Again and again, he accused the United States of conducting secret talks with the Brotherhood. "You think you can correct the

mistakes that you made in Iran, where you had no contact with the Ayatollah Khomeini and his fanatic groups before they seized power," Mubarak said. "But, I can assure you, these groups will never take over this country, and they will never be on good terms with the United States."³¹ To a large extent, Mubarak was right that many U.S. officials expected that the Islamists would seize control of Egypt, and so they sought an inside track with the Islamic right. Foreshadowing the neoconservative dreams after 2001 of reshaping the Middle East and imposing some new democratic order there, an official at the National Security Council said in early 1995 that Egypt's Islamists were the wave of the future:

The existing Middle Eastern regimes, said this official, are bound to disappear in the future because change is inevitable; one of Washington's major policy objectives is to manage the transition to a new Middle Eastern political order with minimal cost. The United States views Islamists as integral players among the broad social forces operating in the region. Thus, to survive, the dominant ruling elites will have to broaden their social base by integrating Islamists into the political field. This reality explains the rationale for the Clinton administration's early decision to maintain a discreet dialogue with the Algerian and Egyptian Islamists.³²

Neither Algeria's government nor Mubarak thought much of that "reality," however, and they acted to crush the Islamist insurgency. Following the 1995 assassination attempt, Mubarak launched an assault against the Muslim Brotherhood that recalled the 1954 and 1964-66 crackdowns by Nasser. Hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood leaders were arrested, their institutions were dismantled, professional syndicates closed, and show trials held. Some U.S. officials predicted that the repression would backfire, but instead, during the second half of the 1990s, the Islamic right in Egypt retreated with one glaring exception: a series of spectacular terrorist acts directed against tourists in Egypt in 1997. The Islamic right in Egypt had, once again, been beaten into submission. But it did not go away. Its violence-oriented underground scattered, or went into hiding. Its moderate-seeming ideologues, preachers, and politicians sought alliance with Egypt's democratic opposition, declaring their support for elections to replace Mubarak. Many U.S. government officials, sympathetic Orientalists, and think tanks—from the Brookings Institution to the U.S. Institute for Peace—insisted that the Muslim Brotherhood was a promising partner in a reformed Egypt.

The Taliban

The third Islamist eruption to confront U.S. policy makers was the meteoric rise of the Taliban in war-shattered Afghanistan.

The most incisive account of the founding, growth and victory of the Taliban is Ahmed Rashid's *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. A veteran Pakistani reporter, Rashid spent years covering Afghanistan and Pakistan's ISI. According to Rashid, from the start the Taliban had strong support not only from Saudi Arabia, which financed it, and from Pakistan, whose ISI intelligence service was the primary force behind the Taliban's conquest of warlord-dominated Afghanistan, but from the United States as well. "Between 1994 and 1996, the U.S.A. supported the Taliban politically through its allies Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, essentially because Washington viewed the Taliban as anti-Iranian, anti-Shia, and pro-Western," he wrote. "Between 1995 and 1997 U.S. support was even more driven because of its backing for the Unocal project [for an energy pipeline from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan]." Many U.S. diplomats, he wrote, "saw them as messianic do-gooders—like born-again Christians from the American Bible Belt."³³

The U.S. support for the Taliban was strategic. It precisely echoed Brzezinski's "arc of Islam" policy and Casey's dream of using Islam to penetrate the Soviet Union. Even in the post-Cold War world, the United States sought to gain advantage in oil-rich Central Asia, and throughout the 1990s Washington jockeyed for position. In the American view, its allies were Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, and its competitors were Russia, China, India, and Iran. A 1996 State Department memo, written just before the Taliban captured Kabul, warned that Russia, Iran, and India—all of which feared Sunni fundamentalism in the region—would back an anti-Taliban force in Afghanistan,³⁴ and that is precisely what did happen, as the Ahmed Shah Massoud-led Northern

Alliance emerged in the late 1990s as the chief opponent of the Taliban's fanatical regime. (Ironically, it would be the Northern Alliance that would be the chief ally of the United States when, after the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the United States invaded Afghanistan.)

Graham Fuller, in *The Future of Political Islam*, accurately described how the Taliban threatened nations competing with the United States in Central Asia:

Important external forces that shared a stake in Afghan events were disturbed at the implications of a Taliban takeover: Iran because the Taliban were fiercely anti-Shiite and treated the Shiite Hazara population with extreme harshness; and Russia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan because they feared the Taliban would turn their sights toward expanding Islamist movements north into central Asia. India, too, geopolitically sought to deny Pakistan strategic dominance in Afghanistan, which a Taliban victory would represent. Washington was initially neutral and hoped, with Pakistani urging, that the Taliban had no anti-U.S. agenda, could at last unify the country so long wracked by civil war; could facilitate the passage of Turkmen gas pipelines through Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean, skirting Iran; could impose control over the rampant poppy production, and crack down on the presence of Muslim guerrillas and training camps in the country since the anti-Soviet jihad.³⁵

Cold War or not, the United States explicitly stated its intention to challenge Russian hegemony in Central Asia and Afghanistan. U.S. policy, said Sheila Haslin, an NSC official, was to "promote the independence of these oil-rich countries, to in essence break Russia's monopoly control over the transportation of oil from that region, and frankly, to promote Western energy security through diversity of supply."³⁶ Unocal, the prime backer of plans for a pipeline to guarantee that diversity, hired numerous former U.S. officials to promote its scheme, from Henry Kissinger to Zalmay Khalilzad, the future U.S. ambassador in Kabul. Khalilzad, a specialist at the RAND Corporation, said in 1996: "The Taliban does not practice the anti-U.S. style of fundamentalism practiced by Iran—it is closer to the Saudi model. The group upholds a mix of traditional Pashtun values and an orthodox interpretation of Islam."³⁷

Besides Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, two other U.S. allies joined in the regional strategy for ousting Russia and containing Iran: Israel and Turkey. In the 1990s, Turkey—which was increasingly falling under the spell of its own Muslim Brotherhood-linked Islamist movement—was being encouraged by Washington to extend its influence into Central Asia, where a large Turkic population was, they thought, ready to respond to a Turkish-led bloc stretching from the Bosphorus to China.

At exactly the same time that Osama bin Laden was setting up headquarters in Afghanistan, after being asked to leave Sudan in 1996, the Taliban leaders who hosted him, and who were becoming increasingly dependent on bin Laden's financial support, were crisscrossing the United States, meeting U.S. officials, oil men, and academics. Protests against the Taliban from women's groups, who opposed the Taliban's hateful treatment of Afghan women, were (at first) overlooked by the Clinton administration and by Unocal, who preferred to see the Taliban as a mini-version of Saudi Arabia's ruling elite. "The Taliban," said a State Department official, "will probably develop like the Saudis. There will be Aramco, pipelines, an emir, no parliament, and lots of sharia law. We can live with that."³⁸

During the U.S.-Taliban era of cooperation from 1994 to 1998—which ended with the bombings of two U.S. embassies in Africa, when the United States targeted not only bin Laden but his Afghan allies as well—a key Unocal consultant was a University of Nebraska academic named Thomas Gouttierre, director of the Center for Afghanistan Studies there. During and after the Afghan jihad, Gouttierre's center secured more than \$60 million in federal grants for "educational" programs in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although the funding for Gouttierre's work was funneled through the State Department's Agency for International Development, the CIA was its sponsor. And it turned out that Gouttierre's education program consisted of blatant Islamist propaganda, including the creation of children's textbooks in which young Afghanis were taught to count by enumerating dead Russian soldiers and adding up Kalashnikov rifles, all of it imbued with Islamic

fundamentalist rhetoric. The Taliban liked Gouttierre's work so much that they continued to use the textbooks he created, and when a delegation of Taliban officials visited the United States in 1997 they made a special stop in Omaha to pay homage to Gouttierre. In 1999, another Taliban delegation, which included military commanders with ties to bin Laden and Al Qaeda, was escorted by Gouttierre on a tour of Mount Rushmore.³⁹ "You sit down with them and they are relatively regular Joes," said Gouttierre, according to the *Omaha World Herald*.⁴⁰ When the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001, one of its tasks was to purge and replace Gouttierre's Taliban-endorsed (and CIA-funded) Islamists textbooks in the schools. "The primers," the *Washington Post* reported, "were filled with talk of jihad."⁴¹

A Clash of Civilizations?

By the end of the 1990s, a tense stalemate existed respecting the power of the Islamic right in the Middle East and south Asia. In Egypt and Algeria, the Islamists had been beaten into submission, but they maintained a low-level presence. In Afghanistan, Iran, and Sudan they held the high ground, controlling radical Islamic republics under dictatorial regimes. In Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the Islamists exercised extraordinary power in alliance with ruling elites, although the royal family in Saudi Arabia and the army in Pakistan were increasingly edgy about their respective deals with the devil. Islamism was making unprecedented gains in Turkey, whose seventy-year secular tradition reaching back to Kemal Ataturk was threatened by right-wing Islamists tied to the Muslim Brotherhood and the Naqshbandi Sufi secret society.

In the United States, from the Iranian revolution until the late 1990s, almost no one gave a thought to the problems in the Middle East caused by Islamism. Even that violent subset of Islamism—namely, Islamic terrorist groups—was essentially ignored, according to Woolsey and other CIA officials, with the exception of Hezbollah. The CIA and U.S. counterterrorism officials finally responded to a series of wake-up calls (the 1996 destruction of the U.S. military's Khobar Towers facility in Saudi Arabia, the 1998 car bombing of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the 2000 attack on the U.S.S. *Cole* off the coast of Yemen) by creating a series of task forces dedicated to Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, and its allies, who became Public Enemy No. 1.

But the U.S. effort to find and eliminate bin Laden was laughably incompetent. A \$27 billion U.S. intelligence system, with perhaps 100,000 employees spread among a dozen agencies, with a vast array of satellites, surveillance devices, spies, agents, and informers, failed to find him. At the same time, however, countless journalists from the United States and Europe, including television reporters from CNN and *Frontline*, found him with ease and conducted lengthy interviews. Would-be terrorists with questionable bona fides, such as John Walker Lindh, managed to get close to bin Laden, but the CIA couldn't replicate the feat. Cruise missile attacks against alleged bin Laden hideouts in Afghanistan failed miserably, and attacks on facilities in Sudan allegedly tied to Al Qaeda efforts to produce weapons of mass destruction managed to destroy that country's only factory for producing medicines. A scheme to kidnap bin Laden, meticulously planned, was aborted.

Then, on September 11, 2001, those who believed in the clash of civilizations got the opening they needed. Their views, until then considered odd at best and extremist at worst, won a far wider following. And the Bush administration, while not endorsing the idea of a struggle between Christianity and Islam, seized the notion of a clash of civilizations to propel the United States into an unprecedented expansion of its imperial presence in the Middle East.

Lewis and Huntington

Until that date, the two men most responsible for popularizing the idea of a clash of civilizations, Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, were regarded as curiosities by mainstream national security and foreign policy experts. Their Ivy League credentials and access to prestigious publications such as *Foreign Affairs*, and the edgy radicalism of their theories, guaranteed that they would generate controversy, and they did. But few took their ideas seriously, except for a scattered

array of neoconservatives, who, in the 1990s, resided on the fringe themselves. The Lewis-Huntington thesis was hit by a withering salvo of counterattacks from many journalists, academics, and foreign policy gurus.

Samuel Huntington, whose controversial book *The Clash of Civilizations* amounted to a neoconservative declaration of war, wrote that the enemy was not the Islamic right, but the religion of the Koran itself:

The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power. The problem for Islam is not the CIA or the U.S. Department of Defense. It is the West, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture and believe that their superior, if declining power imposes on them the obligation to extend that culture throughout the world.⁴²

What followed from Huntington's manifesto, of course, was that the Judeo-Christian world and the Muslim world were locked in a state of permanent cultural war. The terrorists—such as Al Qaeda, which was still taking shape when Huntington's book came out—were not just a gang of fanatics with a political agenda, but the manifestation of a civilizational conflict. Like a modern oracle of Delphi, Huntington suggested that the gods had foreordained the collision, and mere humans could not stop it.

Huntington acknowledged—without mentioning the role of the United States—that Islam had been a potent force against the left during the Cold War. "At one time or another during the Cold War many governments, including those of Algeria, Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, and Israel, encouraged and supported Islamists as a counter to communist or hostile nationalist movements," he wrote. "At least until the Gulf War, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states provided massive funding to the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist groups in a variety of countries."⁴³ But he had a neat explanation of how the alliance between the West and the Islamists unraveled. "The collapse of communism removed a common enemy of the West and Islam and left each the perceived major threat to the other," he wrote.⁴⁴ "In the 1990s many saw a 'civilizational cold war' again developing between Islam and the West."⁴⁵ Huntington, who is not an expert on Islam, observed a "connection between Islam and militarism,"⁴⁶ and he asserted: "Islam has from the start been a religion of the sword and it glorifies military virtues."⁴⁷ Just to make sure that no one could miss his point, he quoted an unnamed U.S. Army officer who said, "The southern tier"—i.e., the border between Europe and the Middle East—"is rapidly becoming NATO's new front line."⁴⁸

Huntington quotes his guru on matters Islamic, Bernard Lewis, in order to prove that Islam presents an existential threat to the very survival of the West:

"For almost a thousand years," Bernard Lewis observes, "from the first Moorish landing in Spain to the second Turkish siege of Vienna, Europe was under constant threat from Islam." Islam is the only civilization which has put the survival of the West in doubt, and it has done that at least twice.⁴⁹

How exactly the weak, impoverished, and fragmented countries of the Middle East and south Asia could "put the survival of the West in doubt" was not explained. But it was a thesis that Bernard Lewis had been refining since the 1950s.

Lewis, a former British intelligence officer and longtime supporter of the Israeli right, has been a propagandist and apologist for imperialism and Israeli expansionism for more than half a century. He first used the term "clash of civilizations" in 1956, in an article that appeared in the *Middle East Journal*, in which he endeavored to explain "the present anti-Western mood of the Arab states." Lewis asserted then that Arab anger was not the result of the "Palestine problem," nor was it related to the "struggle against imperialism." Instead, he argued, it was "something deeper and vaster":

What we are seeing in our time is not less than a clash between civilizations—more specifically, a revolt of the world of Islam against the shattering impact of Western civilization which, since the 18th century, has dislocated and disrupted the old order. . . . The resulting anger and frustration are often generalized against Western civilization as a whole.⁵⁰

It was a theme he would return to again and again. By blaming anti-Western feeling in the Arab world on vast historical forces, Lewis absolved the West of its neocolonial post-World War II oil grab, its support for the creation of a Zionist state on Arab territory, and its ruthless backing of corrupt monarchies in Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf. In his classic 1964 book, *The Middle East and the West*, he repeated his nostrum: "We [must] view the present discontents of the Middle East not as a conflict between states or nations, but as a clash of civilizations."⁵¹ Lewis explicitly made the point that the United States must not seek to curry favor with the Arabs by pressuring Israel to make peace. "Some speak wistfully of how easy it would all be if only Arab wishes could be met—this being usually interpreted to mean those wishes that can be satisfied at the expense of other parties," i.e., Israel.⁵² Instead, he demanded, the United States should simply abandon the Arabs. "The West should ostentatiously disengage from Arab politics, and in particular, from inter-Arab politics," wrote Lewis. "It should seek to manufacture no further Arab allies."⁵³ Why seek alliance with nations whose very culture and religion make them unalterably opposed to Western civilization?

Over several decades, Lewis played a critical role as professor, mentor, and guru to two generations of Orientalists, academics, U.S. and British intelligence specialists, think tank denizens, and assorted neoconservatives, while earning the scorn of countless other academic specialists on Islam who considered Lewis hopelessly biased in favor of a Zionist, anti-Muslim point of view. A British Jew born in 1916, Lewis spent five years during World War II as a Middle East operative for British intelligence, and then settled at the University of London.⁵⁴ In 1974 he migrated from London to Princeton, where he developed ties to people who would later lead the fledgling neoconservative movement. "Lewis became [Senator Henry] Jackson's guru, more or less," said Richard Perle,⁵⁵ a former top Pentagon official who, as chairman of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board, was the most prominent advocate for war with Iraq in 2003, and who is a longtime acolyte of Lewis's. Lewis also became a regular visitor to the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University, where he developed close links to Ariel Sharon.

By the 1980s, Lewis was hobnobbing with top Department¹ of Defense officials. According to Pat Lang, the former DIA official, Bernard Lewis was frequently called down from Princeton to provide tutorials to Andrew Marshall, director of the Office of Net Assessments, an in-house Pentagon think tank.⁵⁶ Another of Lewis's students was Harold Rhode, a polyglot Middle East expert who went to work in the Pentagon and stayed for more than two decades, serving as Marshall's deputy. Over the past twenty years, Lewis has served as the in-house consultant on Islam and the Middle East to a host of neoconservatives, including Perle, Rhode, and Michael Ledeen. Asked whom he drew on for expertise during his tenure as CIA director, James Woolsey says, "We had people come in and give seminars. I remember talking to Bernard Lewis."⁵⁷

Although Lewis maintained a veneer of academic objectivity, and though many scholars acknowledged Lewis's credentials as a primary-source historian on the history of the Ottoman Empire, Lewis abandoned all pretense of academic detachment in the 1990s. In 1998, he officially joined the neocon camp, signing a letter demanding regime change in Iraq from the ad hoc Committee for Peace and Security in the Gulf, co-signed by Perle, Martin Peretz of *The New Republic*, and future Bush administration officials, including Paul Wolfowitz, David Wurmser, and Dov Zakheim. He continued to work closely with neoconservative think tanks, and in the period after September 11, 2001, Lewis was ubiquitous, propagating his view that Islam was unalterably opposed to the West. Two weeks after 9/11, Perle invited Lewis and Ahmed Chalabi to speak before the influential Defense Policy Board, inaugurating a two-year effort by neoconservatives to prove a nonexistent link between Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. Chalabi, a friend of Perle's and Lewis's since the 1980s, led an exile Iraqi opposition group, the Iraqi National Congress, and Chalabi was responsible for feeding reams of misleading information to U.S.

intelligence officers that helped the Bush administration exaggerate the extent of the threat posed to the United States by Iraq.

Less than a month after Lewis and Chalabi's appearance, the Pentagon created a secret rump intelligence unit led by Wurmser, which later evolved into the Office of Special Plans (OSP). It was organized by Rhode and Douglas Feith, the undersecretary of defense for policy. "Rhode is kind of the Mikhail Suslov of the neocon movement," says Lang, referring to the late chief ideologue for the former Soviet Communist Party. "He's the theoretician."⁵⁸ It was Rhode and Feith's OSP, under neocon Abram Shulsky, which manufactured false intelligence that blamed Iraq for ties to Al Qaeda. And it was the OSP which created talking-points papers for Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and other top Bush administration officials claiming that Iraq had extensive stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons, long-range missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles, and a well-developed nuclear program.⁵⁹ Chalabi's falsified intelligence fed directly into the OSP, from whence it ended up in speeches by Cheney, Rumsfeld, and other top Bush administration officials. On the eve of the Iraq war, Lewis, who was close to Cheney, had a private dinner with the vice president to discuss plans for the war in Iraq,⁶⁰ and, in 2003, Lewis dedicated his book *The Crisis of Islam* "To Harold Rhode."

The War on Terror

In going to war, first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq, and in declaring the start of a global war on terrorism with no end in sight, President Bush was careful not to embrace fully the Lewis-Huntington theory of a civilizational clash. In speech after speech—and despite an initial clumsy reference to the campaign in the Middle East as a "crusade"—the president insisted that the United States was engaged in a war against terrorists, not a war against the people of the Koran. In fact, however, Bush's war on terrorism is merely an excuse to implement a radical new approach to the Middle East and Central Asia. It is not a policy toward Islam, or Islamic fundamentalism, or even toward terrorism, Islamic or otherwise.

From the start, the president's response to 9/11 displayed a broad imperial vision. He imagined a domino-like series of regime changes in the Middle East, tied to an expanded U.S. military and political presence in the region: First the Taliban, then Saddam Hussein, then regimes in Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and beyond would fall before the onslaught of an imperial democracy. The Bush administration was heavily influenced by neoconservatives inside and outside who preached the gospel of sweeping regional change. Inside were Wolfowitz, Feith, Perle, Marshall, Wurmser, and Shulsky, along with other key officials in the Pentagon, such as Michael Rubin and William Luti, Lewis Libby in Vice President Cheney's office, John Bolton at the State Department, Elliott Abrams at the NSC, and many others; outside were a host of think tank and media activists, including Tom Donnelly and Gary Schmitt of the Project for a New American Century, William Kristol of the *Weekly Standard*, Michael Ledeen of the American Enterprise Institute, Max Singer of the Hudson Institute, and *The New Republic's* Peretz and Lawrence F. Kaplan, and James Woolsey.

"The mission begins in Baghdad, but it does not end there," wrote Kaplan and Kristol in *The War Over Iraq*. "We stand at the cusp of a new historical era.... This is a decisive moment.... It is so clearly about more than Iraq. It is about more even than the future of the Middle East and the war on terror. It is about what sort of role the United States intends to play in the world in the twenty-first century."⁶¹ At a press conference on the eve of the invasion of Iraq, Ledeen put the strategy even more bluntly. "I think we are going to be obliged to fight a regional war, whether we want to or not," he said, asserting that the war could not be limited to Iraq. "It may turn out to be a war to remake the world."⁶²

Such grandiose ideas had long marked the neoconservative vision of the world. In the infamous blueprint for their strategy, drafted in 1996 as a policy memorandum to then-Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel, Perle, Feith, Wurmser, and others described a comprehensive regional policy. The memo, entitled, "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm," called on Israel to work with Turkey and Jordan to "contain, destabilize, and roll back" various states in the region, overthrow Saddam Hussein, press Jordan to restore a scion of its Hashemite

dynasty in Baghdad, and launch military action against Lebanon and Syria as a "prelude to a redrawing of the map of the Middle East [to] threaten Syria's territorial integrity." Nowhere, in the long memo, did it suggest a policy of countering fundamentalist Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood, or even Al Qaeda.⁶³

Nor is democracy the real objective of the Bush administration in the Middle East, despite the central place that idea occupies in the president's rhetoric. Neoconservatives want to control the Middle East, not reform it, even if that means tearing countries apart and replacing them with rump mini-states along ethnic and sectarian lines. The Islamic right, in this context, is just one more tool for dismantling existing regimes, if that is what it takes. In "Rethinking the Middle East" in *Foreign Affairs*, Bernard Lewis forthrightly described a process he called "Lebanonization":

[A] possibility, which could even be precipitated by fundamentalism, is what has of late been fashionable to call "Lebanonization." Most of the states of the Middle East—Egypt is an obvious exception—are of recent and artificial construction and are vulnerable to such a process. If the central power is sufficiently weakened, there is no real civil society to hold the polity together, no real sense of common identity... The state then disintegrates—as happened in Lebanon—into a chaos of squabbling, feuding, fighting sects, tribes, regions and parties.⁶⁴

That, of course, is indeed one possible future for Iraq in the wake of the U.S. invasion, one foreseen by Chas Freeman. "The neoconservatives' intention in Iraq was never to truly build democracy there," he says. "Their intention was to flatten it, to remove Iraq as a regional threat to Israel."⁶⁵

Not only Iraq is vulnerable to disintegration, but the neoconservatives have made explicit their intention to collapse Saudi Arabia, too. In their book, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror*, Richard Perle and David Frum, both fellows at the American Enterprise Institute, suggest mobilizing Shiite fundamentalists against the Saudi state. Because the Shiites are a powerful force along the shore of the Persian Gulf, where Saudi oil fields are, Perle and Frum note that the Saudis have long feared "that the Shiites might someday seek independence for the Eastern Province—and its oil." They add:

Independence for the Eastern Province would obviously be a catastrophic outcome for the Saudi state. But it might be a very good outcome for the United States. Certainly it's an outcome to ponder. Even more certainly, we would want the Saudis to know we are pondering it.⁶⁶

Max Singer, the co-founder of the Hudson Institute, has repeatedly suggested that the United States seek to dismantle the Saudi kingdom by encouraging breakaway states in both the Eastern Province and the western Hijaz. "After [Saddam] is removed, there will be an earthquake in the region," says Singer. "If this means the fall of the [Saudi] regime, so be it."⁶⁷ Ledeen wrote that the fall of the House of Saud could lead to the takeover of the country by pro-Al Qaeda radicals. "In that event," he says, "we would have to extend the war to the Arabian Peninsula, at the very least to the oil-producing regions."⁶⁸ James Akins, the former U.S. ambassador in Riyadh, says: "I've stopped saying that Saudi Arabia will be taken over by Osama bin Laden or a bin Laden clone if we go into Iraq. I'm now convinced that that's exactly what [the neoconservatives] want to happen. And then we take it over."⁶⁹

During the first four years of Bush's war on terror, many critics argued that by invading Afghanistan and Iraq and by raising America's profile in the Middle East so high, the Bush administration was creating a new generation of radical Islamists who would blame the United States for all the ills in the Middle East. Despite its rhetoric about combating Islamist-inspired terrorism, in neither Afghanistan nor Iraq did the Bush administration demonstrate a successful strategy for reversing the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. Michael Scheuer, writing as "Anonymous" in *Imperial Hubris*, stated the case most forcefully:

U.S., British, and other coalition forces are trying to govern apparently ungovernable postwar states in Afghanistan and Iraq while simultaneously fighting growing Islamist insurgencies in each—a state of affairs our leaders call victory. In conducting these activities, and the conventional military campaigns preceding them, U.S. forces and policies are completing the radicalization of the Islamic world, something Osama bin Laden has been trying to do with but incomplete success since the early 1990s. As a result, I think it is fair to conclude that the United States of America remains bin Laden's only indispensable ally.⁷⁰

Whether or not Afghanistan can defeat the remnants of the Taliban, reverse decades of Islamization, dismantle the underground forces of the Islamic right, and create a stable, secular state remains to be seen. Whether Iraq can produce a secular government, crush the forces associated with Al Qaeda that have collected there, suppress Shiite fundamentalist parties such as SCIRI and Al Dawa that have dominated postwar Iraq, and hold off efforts by Iran's ayatollahs to exercise influence inside the territory of their Arab neighbor is also an open question. Chances are at least fifty-fifty that in the not-too-distant future Afghanistan will fall back under the sway of hard-core Islamists and that Iraq will end up with a theocracy only slightly less militant than Iran's. By the same token, the clerical leadership in Teheran appears to have consolidated its iron grip over power in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In Pakistan, President Musharraf—who already tolerates the muscular influence of Islamists in Karachi—could at any moment fall to an Islamist coup d'etat from the army and the ISI, in alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood or other militant parties and groups on the Islamic right. Indonesia and Bangladesh are facing Islamist insurgencies, Turkey has been drifting into the Islamist camp for more than a decade, and Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine are all facing severe pressure from the Muslim Brotherhood. The heart of the Arab world, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, are both facing pressure to open up their political systems, which many observers believe could lead to the establishment of Islamic republics in both countries.

The case of Iraq is most startling. President Bush went to war in Iraq after accusing Saddam Hussein of forging an alliance with Al Qaeda. He warned that Saddam might be inclined to give weapons of mass destruction to bin Laden's cells. But, as became evident in 2003, Saddam's regime had no ties to Al Qaeda and no weapons of mass destruction to distribute. The regime in Baghdad, dictatorial though it was, was a secular one whose Baath Party leadership was a confirmed enemy of the Islamists—both the Shiite variety and the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood. But Bush, consciously and with deliberation, encouraged Iraq's Islamists to reach for power. American forces and the CIA brought an ayatollah from London to Najaf, Iraq, and forged a pragmatic alliance with another ayatollah, Ali al-Sistani, an Iranian cleric who became the kingmaker in Iraq after the war. The United States worked with a radical Iraqi cleric, Abdel-Aziz al-Hakim, who commanded the 20,000-strong paramilitary Badr Brigade, a force that was armed and trained by Iran. And it promoted a terrorist group called the Islamic Call, or Al Dawa, a group that over its forty-year history had conducted bombings, assassinations, and other violent attacks, including an attack against the American embassy in Kuwait in the early 1980s. On the Sunni front, in central Iraq, the chief political party to emerge after the war in 2003 was the Iraqi Islamic Party, the Muslim Brotherhood's official branch in Iraq.

The Bush administration has set into motion a chain of events that could lead to a reprise of the Algeria crisis of 1992. in countless states in the region. Even tiny states such as Kuwait, where the Brotherhood is strong, and Bahrain, with its Sunni royal family and its Shiite majority population, are vulnerable to Islamic revolution or ballot-box Islamist triumphs—or both.

Reuel Marc Gerecht is a former CIA officer with experience in Iraq and the Middle East, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and a neoconservative hard-liner who was a leading voice in support of the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. For three years after 2001, he appeared at AEI forums alongside Perle, Ledeen, and other neoconservatives, while writing for the *Weekly Standard* and many other right-wing publications, including the *Wall Street Journal's* op-ed page. Early in 2005 Gerecht dropped all pretense of opposing the Islamic right, issuing a clarion call for the United States to encourage both Sunni and Shiite fundamentalism throughout the entire Middle East.

In a January 2005 appearance at AEI, Gerecht announced the release of his new book, *The Islamic Paradox: Shiite Clerics, Sunni Fundamentalists, and the Coming of Arab Democracy*. In it, Gerecht declared that the future of the Middle East lies with the Islamic right, and that the United States ought to welcome it. Although many Americans hope that moderate, secular Muslims are the silent majority in the Middle East, Gerecht says, " 'Moderate Muslims' may not be the key to a new, less threatening Middle East."⁷¹ He added:

Most American liberals and conservatives will strongly resist the idea that Islam's clergymen and lay fundamentalists, who usually dislike, if not detest, the United States, Israel, and progressive causes like women's rights, are the key to liberating the Muslim Middle East from its age-old reflexive hostility to the West. These men, not the much-admired liberal Muslim secularists who are always praised and sometimes defended by the American government and press, are the United States' most valuable potential democratic allies.⁷²

Gerecht compares Khomeini favorably to Mubarak:

Khomeini submitted the idea of an Islamic republic to an up-or-down popular vote in 1979, and regular elections with some element of competition are morally essential to the regime's conception of its own legitimacy, something not at all the case with President Husni Mubarak's dictatorship in Egypt.⁷³ ... Anti-Americanism is the common denominator of the Arab states with "pro-American" dictators. By comparison, Iran is a profoundly pro-American country.⁷⁴

And after acknowledging the direct intellectual connections between Hassan al-Banna's Muslim Brotherhood and Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda, he concludes, astonishingly, that a Muslim Brotherhood dictatorship in Egypt would be better than Mubarak's regime:

Egypt is probably the Arab country that has the best chance of quickly marrying fundamentalism and democracy. It is certainly possible that fundamentalists, if they gained power in Egypt, would try to end representative government. The democratic ethic, although much more common in Egypt than many Westerners believe, is not as well anchored as it is among the Shiites of Iran or in the fatwas of Grand Ayatollah Sistani. But the United States would still be better off with this alternative than with a secular dictatorship.⁷⁵

Sixty years earlier, when the United States began its odyssey in the Middle East, there were other voices who wanted conservative Islam, and early fundamentalist groups associated with the nascent Islamic right, to do battle with the secular left, with Nasser, with Arab communists and socialists. Now, six decades later, the Bush administration is pursuing a strategy in the Middle East that seems calculated to boost the fortunes of the Islamic right. The United States is counting on Shiite fundamentalists in Iraq to save its failed policy in that country, and a major theoretician of that campaign explicitly calls for the United States to cast its lot in with ayatollahs and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The devil's game continues.

Notes

Chapter 4

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