A Basis for Middle East Islamic Extremism

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Islamic extremism is a 20th and 21st century phenomenon that has shown no signs of abating as Islamic extremists have committed terrorist acts on nearly every continent. At times, such as the 10 August 2006 discovery in the United Kingdom of the home grown extremist plot to blow up several jetliners over the North Atlantic Ocean, law enforcement has preempted extremists' efforts. At other times law enforcement and intelligence agencies have been unable to prevent the extremists' terrorist attacks such as in London in July 2005, Madrid in March 2004 and Indonesia in 2002, 2003, and 2005. Although present in much of today's world, Islamic extremism has its roots and origins in the Middle East and certain factors or forces tend to perpetuate its existence there. In the Middle East, there also exists competing philosophies between those populations. It is the purpose of this article to identify and discuss each of these forces that contribute to a continuation of Middle East extremism from a Western perspective and also provide some perspective on the two competing philosophies.

Two common questions currently concerning homeland security are: "Is our country safer now than five years ago?" and "Are we winning the war on terror?" The answers to those questions like most questions of this nature are highly dependent upon the respondent's political views and the respondent's perception of national security issues. But these questions are pertinent because since the events of September 11, 2001, our nation has been involved in a so called war on terror that has lasted longer than WWII, albeit without costing as many American lives. Given the longevity of this so-called war and the fact that there is no centralized adversary, why is it that this war seems to perpetuate itself? What issues or factors exist that contribute to a seemingly endless stream of suicide bombers or an extremist recruitment pool? It cannot be as simple an answer as Muslim reaction to blasphemous cartoons of the prophet Muhammad or the shameful treatment of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib. Answers to these questions are woven into the fabric of the Middle East and Islamic culture, and its exploratory relationship with modernity. Therefore, it is the purpose of this paper to identify and examine from a Westerners' perspective some underlying causative factors that seem to perpetuate Islamic extremism in the Middle East and also create the sense of the Arab world's being left behind by the modern world.

When manipulated by extremists and absorbed by impressionable youth, certain political, socioeconomic, cultural, geopolitical, religious, and external forces exist in the Middle East that aids extremists' in their recruiting and fundraising activities. At the same time, and without trying to justify the extremists' activities, these same forces provide, to a certain extent, some rationalization for extremist activity. Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden has said that "nothing is more sacred than belief except repulsing an enemy who is attacking religion and life" (Anonymous, 2003). This message and others like it resonate with Muslims in the Middle East, Europe, and South Asia and lead to incidents such as the London bombings of July 2005, the riots in France in the fall of that year and bombings in Indonesia in 2002, 2003, and 2005, and most recently the disrupted British home grown terrorist airline plots of August 10, 2006. Unfortunately, baring a radical turn of events or attitudes, it is unlikely that many of these forces as mentioned above and detailed in the below paragraphs will be rectified in the near term. However, as desperate as some of these situations are, some practical long-term solutions to mitigating Islamic extremism in the Middle East must be sought.

Historical roots in perceived discrimination

In a recent survey by the Gallup Organization, Muslims identified as 'political radicals' said their greatest fear was U.S. occupation/domination and that Islam itself was being threatened (The Wall Street Journal, 2006). This perception of invasion by a predominantly Christian country has been repeatedly exploited in the media by Osama bin Laden and serves as a rallying point for Islamic extremists. Speaking prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003, bin Laden stated, "We are following up with great interest and extreme concern the crusaders' preparations for war to occupy a former capital in Islam, loot Muslim wealth and install an agent government…" (Huntington, 2006, p. 3). Here, bin Laden is playing upon the modern Arab world's paranoia of invasion that has historical precedence dating back to the Crusades when Christian knights in the 13th century first conquered Jerusalem and other traditional Arab lands. For Muslims, the Crusades represented only the first in a long line of examples where the Christian West, exemplified primarily by Europe, had literally conquered Arab lands. For example, after World War I the Balfour Declaration effectively divided significant portions of the Middle East into European Colonial fiefdoms. Following World War I, Jews began immigrating to Palestine and often displaced Arab farmers, sometimes forcefully. Only after World War II did individual nation states replace European colonialism; for example, Syria and Jordan in 1946, and Israel in 1948. Iraq received its independence in 1932 following years of British colonial rule. Finally, Egypt also did not receive its full independence from Britain until following World War II.

The above historical examples provide a backdrop for Muslim dissatisfaction and perceived grievances with the West. It should also be noted that, with the notable exception of Saudi Arabia, at the conclusion of World War I various secular governments had been established throughout the Middle East. Unfortunately, the newly established governments in primarily Egypt, Syria, and Iraq fell victim to the influences of power and corruption. The failure to establish a viable political process and representative government in the modern era is one reason for the current extremists' fixation on the past. Previous Spanish and British empires are distant memories in those countries, but the Arabs are still fighting the Crusades and wishing the Mongol invasions and the Spanish Reconquista - which destroyed their great medieval centers in Baghdad and Andalusia - had never happened (Khashan, 2000).

Forces Contributing to Islamic Extremism

As noted above, although there may be others, certain political, socioeconomic, geopolitical, religious, cultural, and external forces, when successfully manipulated by Muslim extremists, are collectively the primary reasons for continued terrorism in the Middle East. Taken separately, each of these causative factors can be the subject of further discourse. However, the author intends to briefly discuss each topic in the larger context of perceived grievances that contribute to a continuation of Muslim extremism in the Middle East. In presenting these grievances in this way, the context is set for engaging in political discourse instead of violence.

Political forces

Of all the impediments to an Arab renaissance, political restrictions on human development are the most stubborn (United, 2004). Accordingly, the despotism and corruption of Middle Eastern government officials are primary contributors to the continuance of Islamic extremism. Moreover, the U.S. continues to be an extremist target because of its support for some of those leaders. It is well documented that the U.S. has politically and/or economically supported secular rulers in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and, prior to 1979, Iran. Egypt represents a special case in that it was the first Arab state to sign a peace accord with Israel and has since been the recipient of billions of dollars in U.S. financial aid.   Unfortunately, continued U.S. financial support has likely contributed to the perpetuation of the regime of President Hosni Mubarak and Egypt's corresponding lack of economic progress and political stagnation. The U.S. support for autocratic rulers such as in Saudi Arabia and the aforementioned countries has been exploited successfully by Osama bin Laden. His successful argument to extremists has been that only with U.S. support have these regimes been able to maintain their current hold on political power. To some extent bin Laden may be correct in his assessment, but to mitigate this effect requires establishment of some form of democratic political process within these secular regimes, not a turn toward extremism.

The Bush administration has long declared that one of its goals in Iraq is the establishment of a democratically elected government. Although not often stated, but implied, is the hope that some form of democracy would eventually spread to neighboring countries. However, the fear of a political takeover by Muslim extremists via a democratic voting process among secular and autocratic Arab regimes is real. The recent election of Hamas was seen by some Western and Israeli observers as a rejection by the Palestinians of the corruption and cronyism of the Palestinian Authority, not necessarily a vote for continued armed conflict with Israel. Nevertheless, the Palestinian people spoke with their votes. Subsequently, Hamas has had to deal with factional infighting with Fatah activists, Western pressure to end the armed struggle and recognize Israel, and a cutoff of financial resources from the West and Israel. Economic hardship in Gaza is exacerbated when thousands of Palestinian day workers are prevented from their jobs in Israel when Israelis close the border in response to continued firing of Hamas' rockets into Israel. Hamas is now being exposed to the difficulties of transitioning from revolutionary organization to a governing body and is undoubtedly finding the transition difficult. This is not to say that the transition cannot be successful. However, unless funding from the West or Arab nations begins to flow, and Hamas extremists are brought under control by their political leadership, the Palestinian people will be no better off than they were with Fatah in charge. To date this is the only example of a duly elected and overtly militant government in the Middle East.

The above examples speak to the larger question of whether Western style democracy can succeed in the Arab world. To answer this question one has to examine the implications surrounding democracy and then attempt to ascertain whether this will work in the Middle East. Democracy itself is more than people voting for a government or leadership. Democracy in its basic form is also about checks and balances, principles that ensure that one branch of government does not become too powerful, and the rule of law. Until these basic concepts establish themselves in the Arab mindset, then Western democracy is unlikely to flourish in the Middle East. Democracy is also about human rights and the opportunities to improve one's place in life without discrimination. The implication here being that women's rights from a Western perspective are basically ignored in Arab society and that democratic reform will put this right.

Again, this concept may not appeal to some in the Arab world, but this is one of the bedrocks of Western democratic principles.

This is not to say that Arab governments cannot establish these democratic principles, with, albeit, an Arab flavor. Historically, though, those in power in the Middle East have been very reluctant to give it up, especially if Muslim fundamentalists or extremists are seen as poised to take over the government in a fair election. It is often said that it is easier to be in opposition than to be making the hard decisions necessary to govern effectively. Moreover, democracy is an evolutionary process. Therefore, it is reasonable then that the West should continue to promote democracy in the Middle East, and let the chips fall where they may in terms of the electoral vote and how the new government is eventually constructed. If Hamas is any example, the pressures of governing and having to answer to the people may in fact be the best long-term political solution for the West and the Middle East.

Socioeconomic forces

It is difficult to separate social and economic factors as they are intertwined in the Muslim public's perception and religion. At first glance, one would assume that because the Middle East controls a majority percentage of the world's oil output, there would be little poverty and the people would be well educated. However, there is a significant societal and economic gap between those that have access to the oil wealth and those that have not seen the benefits from recent oil windfalls.   This uneven distribution of wealth and the corresponding absence of a middle class have led to a large gap between the rich and the poor in the Middle East. In contrast, India has a burgeoning economic middle class that has helped establish India as a future economic powerhouse. Using India as a model, the establishment of a middle class in the Middle East appears essential for long term socioeconomic development. However, a middle class cannot be established on a single source such as oil, but must instead be diversified. With economic diversity comes less reliance on oil. Moreover, with an established middle class there would be a sustainable, long term tax base from which funds can be raised to provide the basic services necessary for a society to function. More importantly, these funds would not be subject to the financial swings of a commodities market. Unfortunately, with the exception of Israel, Lebanon, and Jordan, three non-oil based economies, the absence of a middle class in the Middle East is noticeable.

When oil prices were high in the 1970s and 1980s the ruling class was able to provide a large financial safety net and guaranteed jobs. Low oil prices in the 1990s created widespread economic hardship amongst those with modest and low incomes and exposed some of the economic policy failings of the ruling class. Consequently, government services declined and the government could no longer guarantee work for graduating students. Unrest in the population increased due to rising unemployment. In those Middle East countries that relied on oil based economies, there was no other established economic sector to substitute for decreased oil prices. When the price of oil increased to over USD70 per barrel in the summer of 2006, many Arab regimes used oil profits to provide government jobs and subsidized food and not to educate and empower their youth (Friedman, 2006). The shortsightedness of this approach will not be realized until the price of oil declines with the resulting potential of a social explosion throughout the Arab world.

Lack of a basic education has greatly contributed to the lack of economic potential that led to the economic disparities discussed above. According to the Arab Human Development Report of 2004 (United, 2004) approximately one third of Arab men and one half of Arab women in 2002 were illiterate. Education in the Middle East has concentrated primarily on religious and technical studies. Lack of a generalized education complete with the social sciences and humanities does not allow for exposure to other cultures and philosophies. Moreover, a narrowly focused school curriculum does not prepare any student for success in today's world.

In recent years, the numbers of madrasas or religious schools in Pakistan and elsewhere in the Muslim world have increased. Unfortunately, their curriculum is narrowly defined and, in some cases, contains little more that Quranic recitation. Some of these madrasas have become fertile recruiting grounds for Islamic extremists. It becomes dangerous when radicalized thinking turns into radicalized religious behavior. Recall that the Afghan Taliban originated as a student movement educated in Pakistan madrasas. The result was the near takeover of a country and the proliferation of individuals that continue to provide sanctuary to Osama bin Laden and serve as a recruitment base for worldwide extremism.

Education alone cannot eliminate Islamic extremism. Consider, for example, that many of the 9/11 hijackers were well educated; in fact, 9/11 organizer Mohammed Atta had an engineering degree. Osama bin Laden has an economics degree while his second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is a medical doctor. However, for a country as a whole to succeed in today's globalized world, there must be a process that will comprehensively educate the country's youth. Curricula can and must be constructed that will satisfy both the religious and general education requirements.

Geopolitical forces

The two largest geopolitical issues in the Middle East that contribute to Middle East extremism are the U.S. presence in Iraq and the resulting insurgency and the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. While relationships between Israel and Hizballah are contentious at best, their recent conflict was but a strategically significant sidebar to the longer term problem of Palestinian/Israeli relations. In contrast to Hizballah, the Palestinians represent a duly elected government with a permanent physical presence on Israel's southern border. Hizballah, despite its military prowess, remains an ephemeral Iranian lackey. The Palestinian/Israeli situation and the U.S. war in Iraq form the foundation for Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups' justifying many of their regional terrorist activities. There have been countless articles written about these conflicts, and it is not the intention of this piece to provide either background or additional details. Suffice to say that both stories have not yet concluded, and the results could influence the path of the Middle East for generations to come. Further, the U.S. cannot exit the nation of Iraq until Iraqi security forces can provide basic security, and the freely elected government begins to take control in terms of providing basic services and righting the economy. Leaving before such stability is in place risks continued civil conflict. Once a successfully working alternative to the insurgents is provided, the Iraqi people may see the benefits of peace. Similarly, Hamas now has to decide how it is going to co-exist with Israel because the Jewish state is simply not going away. In addition, there are other countries, the U.S. chief among them, that are not going to let Israel be exterminated. Hamas will have to come to some

sort of reconciliation with Israel if it ever hopes to govern effectively. Too many other countries have an interest in finding a political settlement for Hamas to believe it can impose a military solution on the area.

Religious forces

There are many fundamentalist religious forces acting in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and other Middle East countries. Even though fundamentalists do not automatically equate to extremists or terrorists, there are many Middle East adherents to the religious writings of Taqi al Din ibn Taymiyyah (1269-1328), Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) (White, 2006), and Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-1787) (Marsden, 2002) that preach not only Islamic conservatism but violent rejection of other religions and violence against nonbelievers. Some of the early modern fundamentalist precepts were voiced by the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna. At that time, the Brotherhood's leadership saw great social injustice and economic disparity in Egypt (White, 2006). In seeking to establish that Islam was a religion encompassing all aspects of political, social, and economic life, it was the Brotherhood that first proposed a government based on Islamic religious principles. In addition, some Brotherhood members advocated the right of a movement to take up arms against 'impure' Muslims and regarded Shari'a as governing civil as well as religious life. Building upon the Brotherhoods' teachings, Qutb's writings justified jihad to oppose those in power (Marsden, 2002a). These teachings provided extremists religious justification for opposing Muslim secular regimes as well as conservative, but autocratic, Islamic governments. In a tragic example for his role in signing a peace agreement with Israel, Egyptian president Anwar Sadat was assassinated in 1981 by members of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, a radical terrorist group with roots in the Muslim Brotherhood.

As much as the preceding Muslim fundamentalist philosophers influenced individuals like Osama Bin Laden and his mentor, Abdullah Azzam, there was perhaps no greater fundamentalist upheaval than the 1979 Iranian Islamic revolution. Previously there had been political revolutions founded in Islam resulting in the overthrow of colonial powers; Algeria for example. However, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini organized a popular revolt based on a return to fundamentalism and the rule of Shari'a law. Following the successful overthrow of the Shah of Iran, Khomeini launched his own vision of an Islamic caliphate using violence in the form of support for Hizballah (Marsden, 2002b). It may be said that modern Middle East religious terrorism began as a function of the Iranian revolution. In fact, in 1968 there were no identifiable religious terrorist groups. That number had increased to 2 in 1980, 11 in 1992 and 26 in 1995, nearly half of the total number of terrorist organizations for that year identified by Bruce Hoffman (1999) in the *Rand Review*. Interestingly, in 1995 terrorist acts committed in the name of religion accounted for only 25 percent of the terrorist incidents, but accounted for 58 percent of the fatalities (Hoffman, 1998).

The influence of religion cannot be underestimated when discussing forces contributing to Islamic extremism. Bin Laden and his followers see the current struggle with the West as a long, defensive, historical struggle blessed by Allah (Anonymous, 2003). Suicide bombers go to their targets with thoughts of martyrdom and heavenly rewards. Some radical clerics also provide the spiritual guidance and approval allegedly required prior to a mass killing or other type of terrorist attack. Finally, the influence of Muslim clerics can currently be seen in Iraq as Muqtada al-Sadr has demonstrated with his potential to incite the Shi'a masses. Conversely, other clerics such as Grand Ayatullah Sayyid Ali Husayni Sistani hold

impeccable religious credentials that could influence populations in a positive manner should they choose to do so.

External forces

Although state sponsored terrorism has waned, Iran and Syria still provide significant support for Middle East terrorist groups. Iran remains the primary benefactor of Lebanese Hizballah while Syria provides refuge for Hamas' political leadership and Palestinian Islamic Jihad members. For political reasons, Saudi Arabia is not deemed a state sponsor of terrorism by the U.S. State Department, but has, perhaps unwittingly, provided manpower for the insurgency in Iraq and many martyrs for al-Qaeda in Iraq formerly led by Abu Musab al-Zarkawi.

Since its founding in 1982, Iran has funded, trained, and provided personnel for Lebanese Hizballah. With worldwide funding activities, its annual budget is reported to exceed $100 million (Myers & Poole, 2006). If directly asked, many counterterrorism analysts place Hizballah as the world's most lethal terrorist group ahead of al-Qaeda (Myers & Poole, 2006). Israel, too, has found Hizballah to be a well equipped, disciplined adversary. Syria meanwhile has been repeatedly accused of allowing foreign fighters' access to Iraq to participate in the insurgency via its 380-mile porous Iraqi border. Moreover, US military intelligence officials claimed that a handful of senior Iraqi Ba'athists operating in Syria were collecting money from private sources in Saudi Arabia and Europe and turning it over to the insurgency (Ricks, 2004). Until recently, Syria had a significant military and intelligence presence in Lebanon, effectively controlling the country. It was not until the assassination of popular former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri revealed possible Syrian government involvement that the Lebanese population demanded Syrian troops depart Lebanon.

Cultural forces

As noted in the previous introduction, some Arabs continue to identify the West as modern day Crusaders or as a society trying to impose its cultural values on Muslim society. This cultural dilemma manifests itself in today's trend toward globalization. Arab cultures are caught between their traditions and the need for modernization just to maintain economic and political pace with the modern world. According to D'Arcy and Levi (2005) from the Brookings Institution's Saban Center for Middle East Policy, the Middle East and Muslim states generally lag behind global standards in economic, human, and political development, but even further behind in developing the science and technology that will keep it apace of the rest of the world for future growth.

Moreover, Haim Harari (2004), Chair of the Davidson Institute of Science Education and Past President of the Weizmann Institute of Science, stated simply that the root of the trouble is that the Muslim region was totally dysfunctional, further adding that this would have been so even if Israel had joined the Arab league and an independent Palestine had existed for several past generations. Continuing, Harari said that the Arab world has only itself to blame for its current condition and lists four factors as contributing to the current world conflict:

(a) suicide murder (b) words or disinformation (c) money and (d) disrespect for laws.

Previously, Huntington (1993) postulated that world politics was entering a new phase and hypothesized that the fundamental source of conflict will be cultural and not ideological or economic.

According to Huntington, we are currently seeing the results of religious extremism based on Western-Muslim cultural differences. While this author believes Huntington is correct to a certain extent, religious based terrorists are not only attacking Western institutions in the name of Allah in Europe and the United States but are operating in the Philippines, China, Africa, and the former Soviet Union. In fact, there are few non-Muslim countries in the world not experiencing some level of conflict with their Muslim minority populations.

Widespread conflict between minority Muslim populations and their host countries does not represent a unique Western/Muslim conflict. Malaysia is an example of a Muslim nation prospering in the modern world because it has adapted and adjusted to a globalized economy while holding to its Muslim culture.   Therefore, the problem(s) lies not necessarily in a cultural gap because cultures can adapt to each other given willingness of both sides. The problem lies between modernity and fundamentalist Islam and the threat that modernity and globalization pose to Islamic fundamentalists. Thus, the Muslim world can no longer rely on the cultural crutch to further justify their anger toward the West.

Middle East Political and Socioeconomic Realities

Since one point of emphasis for this article is to identify contributors to the phenomena of Middle East Islamic extremism, one should have to first identify the sources of discontent. These have been noted in the above paragraphs as factors or forces present in the Middle East. However, these factors are mere abstractions of the overall crisis of modernity that fuels Middle Eastern extremism. Several realities in the modern Middle East exist that solidify these abstractions and must be considered when evaluating how to deal with these multi-faceted problems:

(A) The Middle East produces the majority of the world's oil, but the economic elite have not passed these riches to the populace. In fact, as observed by *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman (2006), Lebanon has the only working democracy in the Arab Middle East and is the only country in the region without oil reserves.

(B) Many Arab populations in the Middle East place more emphasis on the power of the family, clan, and tribal allegiance than in contemporary notions of government. This observation has been consistent in present day Afghanistan and Iraq where even ethnic and religious loyalties overshadow the concept of a national government. In addition, the Saudi government is nearly totally composed of the tribal based House of Saud.

(C) Middle Eastern terrorist groups have relied too long on the Palestinian/Israeli conflict to justify continued acts of terrorism. In reality there has been little concern for the plight of the Palestinian people and their refugees over the years. Since their expulsion from the West Bank in 1967, generations of Palestinians have lived and died in refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon. They have not been assimilated into their countries of residence and are mostly discriminated against. Monies previously received from various Arab organizations and countries as a result of now deceased Palestinian Authority president Yasir Arafat's arm twisting was only enough to keep the Palestinian government from failing. The most recent example is that while many Arab governments and terrorist organizations decried the shunning of the new Palestinian government by the West and Israel following Hamas' election, only Iran pledged USD 50 million to the Palestinian Authority to partially relieve the Gaza financial crisis.

(D) Giving in to terrorist demands that the U.S. and coalition forces leave the Middle East will not stop terror attacks there. Global jihad has assumed a life of its own. As noted by many analysts, Osama bin Laden's role has been reduced to being the figurehead of global jihad. However, as mentioned above, he and his followers are in the fight until their goals are achieved. Secular and autocratic Arab governments represent a roadblock to Al-Qaeda's stated goal of a new Islamic Caliphate throughout the Middle East and beyond. Should the U.S. leave the area prematurely, it is highly probable that al-Qaeda would turn its attention to regime replacement in those countries it viewed as either non-Islamic or ruled by 'unpure' Muslims. The irony is that those Middle East regimes are exactly the ones that should be helping the U.S. defeat the Iraqi insurgency, because if the U.S. leaves without eliminating that threat their countries would eventually become targets. The November 2005 hotel bombings in Amman, Jordan by al Qaeda in Iraq terrorists demonstrate the point.

(E) There lies within the Arab populace a sense of injustice that has been building over time and also a feeling that in terms of modernity they have been left behind. Muslims have many times expressed that they share Western ideals of the democratic process: security in their persons, basic personal freedoms, and respect for human rights. It is the denial of these basic human and political rights that have continued to fuel the extremist engine. The result has been a violent backlash directed at not only their governments but also the U.S. as representative of all that they do not now possess in political and socioeconomic terms. Though, when the abovementioned forces are analyzed in terms of guilt, there is little on which to fault the West. The majority of the forces affecting the continuation of extremism in the Middle East are self inflicted.

Conclusion

The arguments herein fall into two consistent themes (1) that certain forces exist in the Middle East that cause and perpetuate Middle East extremism and (2) that the Arab world is caught in a time warp between its unique cultures and traditions and the influences of the modern world. Essentially, then, the Middle East is divided into at least two competing philosophies. One is struggling the need to co-exist and prosper within the context of 21st century politics and economics, and the other completely rejects contemporary political or socioeconomic advances in the world community, maintaining a strict adherence to Shari'a law. One philosophy tends to be at least willing to explore the concept of democratic and global market economic principles and the other seeks to maintain a large proportion of the world's population in a state of constant turmoil in order to establish their own ideals based on religious zealotry.

The obvious question that comes to mind when considering these two competing philosophies is what is 'best' for the Middle East populace. From a Western perspective, and likely most countries with stable governments, the choice is obvious. The philosophy of co-existence equates to stable Middle East governments and economies. That is not to say that improvements cannot be made within current Middle East political and economic systems. Western governments should continually push for greater political representation and more market oriented economies in the Middle East. However, if the philosophy of co-existence is to be made attractive to the majority of the Middle East populace, then the problem becomes one of how to address the forces earlier identified as contributing to continued Islamic extremism and terrorist activities in a manner that mitigates or eliminates these forces. The answers to this

problem are complicated but should be given focus among current Middle East leaders because they, in the long term, are the individuals that are going to have to try to institute a populist message that will engage the Islamic street; the assumption being that individuals will reject extremism and terrorism when guaranteed political representation and greater economic opportunity. How that can be accomplished is left to individual leaders because the Middle East is a vast mixture of cultures, and only those individuals that ostensibly know their peoples and have the political fortitude and desire to extend a populist message will succeed. Western governments can offer subtle, background encouragement and guidance, but the message needs to originate from within the Middle East. Unfortunately, it is probable that if those forces fueling extremism are not addressed to the satisfaction of the majority of Middle Eastern populations, then Islamic extremism, and resultant terrorist activities will continue unabated.

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