

# **Axis of Trouble: Male Youth, Factional Politics and Religion**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Forget the usual arguments about asymmetric warfare. It should be a truism by now that overwhelming conventional strength will invite an unconventional response from clever enemies every time. As Liddell Hart pointed out decades ago with his focus on the indirect approach, *tit for tat* (not just *tat for tat*) is as old as organized warfare.<sup>1</sup> But so, too, are the differences that ensue when identity rather than reputation is at stake. People who find themselves waging war to defend their corporate right to exist almost always end up fighting dirty; those who fight to secure, establish or improve their reputation (or standing) cannot.

The fact that we currently believe we are on the receiving end of dirty war should suggest that our adversaries (Islamists) believe their identity and existence, and not just their reputation, are at stake. This has tremendous implications for the potential length of the War on Terrorism, the ends to which our adversaries will go and where this can lead in terms of future wars.

Most pundits and others would have us believe that Islamists are motivated by humiliation, resentment, revenge and a welter of other “glass-half-empty,” “short-end-of-the-stick” sentiments. But as this paper will assert, that can only be accurate if these are the sole emotions felt by adolescent males, and if this is all that Islam inspires among believers. The linkages between young males, violence and corporate identity are key. Equally important is the sociology that often underlies politics – how factions behave.

My thesis is simple: Westernization threatens Islamists’ identity – identity that, by definition, involves Islam. Opposition to westernization is nothing new. There are, however, new ways to bring the fight to and into the West. Islam itself presents us with some real challenges. But Islam may be just a precursor. One could make the case that this is *déjà vu*: religion is simply reprising its old role, but now with lessons learned from ideological and nationalist struggles. But it is not religion *per se* that is the driver. Instead, the nexus of adolescence + factionalization + westernization drives Nativists *to* religion.

In some ways, much *has* changed since the last great era of religiously-motivated warfare – armaments, for instance. In other ways, certain givens (e.g. what attracts young men) remain the same. Thus, we need to take a careful look at the congruencies, and at where severing linkages does and does not make sense. For instance, despite all the rhetorical attention paid to the need to separate moderate Muslims from Islamist radicals in order to stave off all Muslims uniting against us, this is a false dichotomy. Any student of conflict should recognize that moderates may be radicalized at any point. How else explain who volunteers – and when – to strap on a suicide vest?

We also need to be careful about mistaking beliefs for ideas. Faith and reason can certainly overlap, but experientially we should recognize that conviction and faith occupy and preoccupy

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<sup>1</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954).

different parts of the anatomy (to include different networks in the brain) than do ideas. Ideas are eminently articulable, which is no doubt why many in policy circles want to fight on this basis. Conviction, faith, beliefs – these are things humans have always had difficulty putting into words. Or, as terrorists now make clear on a daily basis in Iraq and elsewhere, *these* are best expressed in deeds.

My focus is on the socio-dynamics among three sets of enablers: adolescence, factionalization, and westernization. I examine Islam as an aid to those who oppose westernization, and review some of the organizational models available to them. I consider these all co-factors. It makes little sense to talk about one without the others since it is their connectedness that poses the real challenge. The confusion over whether Islam is a religion or an ideology is just one small example of how much we are getting wrong.

My premise is that westernization is an endemic, perennial threat to any group that wants to retain its corporate identity. I do not explicitly address ‘why now Islamists?’ I believe the answer is implicit in what I present, though my one word response to ‘why now?’ would be: ‘congruence.’<sup>2</sup> Take these enablers, various events, certain personalities and... together they explain how we have gotten to this point. Congruence is the main culprit, something very hard to convey in writing which demands sequence and narrative. Adolescence plays the main supporting role, and it is the only enabler we may be able to do something about, particularly if we can re-connect it to an old (but tried and true) scourge: nationalism. Therefore, I devote considerable attention to it both at the outset (in the next section) and in the conclusion.

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<sup>2</sup> My two word answer would be: perfect storm.

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## PREFACE

Twenty, maybe even ten, years from now, the Communist challenge is likely to look easy compared to the challenges posed by Islamists. In many regards, the Soviets mirrored us. The USSR was a state with its own political economy. This made Soviets relatively easy both to engage with and contain: geographically, financially, economically, socially, diplomatically, etc. Also, as it turns out, we didn't need as thorough an understanding of the inner workings of the Kremlin as we might have liked. We could be woefully wrong about a lot of important things (e.g. the robustness of the Soviet economy) and still effectively squeeze the Soviets from without. Compare that to our current situation. There are very few ways in which we and Islamists are either alike or equivalent. This not only means we have very little to work on (let alone with), but unless we recognize that we do not have leverage over any of the normal things that have motivated adversaries in the past, we will continue to apply pressure in the wrong places. Or, to carry on with the Communist analogy and extend it further: if our adversaries are not like the Soviets, they are also not exactly Maoist. We cannot dry up the sea in which Islamists swim without obliterating Islam.

In many ways, this challenge is that simple but also that difficult.

Here are just some of the things Islam generates: nativists with a penchant for purifying their religion and their environment, as well as a demand for obeisance or, at the very least, respect from infidels. Also, although Islam may be anti-Western it is not anti-modern. This means it is not quite like other Nativist (or anti-Western) movements that have typically rejected modern technology and weapons in the past.

Syncretism typically refers to an amalgamation between old and new beliefs and practices. In some Nativist movements, traditionalists have borrowed from Western and Christian beliefs (sometimes without even realizing it), while consciously rejecting Western-style explanations for events. Extreme examples of this can be found in places like Uganda today, where fighters in the Lord's Resistance Army have periodically been marched into battle after having been sprinkled with water that, they are promised, will protect them from bullets. Should they be shot, well, the explanation is that they must have violated some taboo.

Invariably, Nativists believe their spiritual power – or strength of will – can overcome Western technology. This doesn't always mean rejecting western-*style* technology, however. For instance, the Japanese circa World War II were firmly convinced that given their superior will – coupled with advanced technology – they could beat us. When we won instead they recognized they had applied superior will to the wrong means (e.g. they should not have fought us militarily). Under the Emperor's command, they then shifted from being militarily anti-Western

*en masse*. Did they then seek to best us economically? Up through the 1980s that surely seemed to be the case.<sup>3</sup>

Here is where Islamists represent some of what made the Japanese so formidable – strength of will married to advanced technology – but with an *inability* to retool: the Nativist impulse is not only inherent to, but *demande*d by, Islam. No emperor (or caliph) exists who can get all Islamists to switch from military to economic or any other form of might. More to the point, some Muslims will always be anti-Western because cleansing the religion means getting rid of our influence.

One thing we should wonder is: does being anti-Western *have* to result in anti-Western violence? To answer this requires working our way through a series of distinctions.

## **ANTI-WESTERNIZATION DOES NOT EQUAL ANTI-MODERNIZATION**

Contrary to popular belief, rejecting westernization is not synonymous with rejecting modernization. Only a handful of societies can be considered anti-modern. The Amish, for instance, are anti-modern in a number of ways, but they are clearly not anti-Western.<sup>4</sup> They are decidedly Christian, pro-American, etc.

Many American Indian tribes contain significant traditionalist, Nativist, or anti-assimilationist factions. Their aim is to remain as spiritually Indian as possible which, for some, means living in traditional housing (e.g. hogans), and foregoing certain (but not all) modern conveniences. The Hopi represent a long-standing classic case of resistance. In fact, hundreds of years ago they conducted their own cleansing campaign against Hopi Christians, burning out an entire Christian village. The Navajo, Lakota, and most Pueblos all have significant traditionalist populations. Because traditionalists reject Christianity we could say this makes them anti-Western by default. But they are not *actively* anti-Western. Thanks to reservations – and the protection reservations afford – the government no longer forces Indians to assimilate. Thus, traditionalist Indians have no reason to wage war against the United States. Ironically, most of their fighting is instead intra-tribal (something that did approximate a war on the Pine Ridge reservation not so many years ago).

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<sup>3</sup> The argument can be made that the Japanese push for economic dominance through the 1980s was not just a reaction to military defeat, but consistent with the Japanese drive to prove their superiority – if military means did not work they simply had to find some other means. Arguably, they have been in a malaise ever since this did not work either. And what other proof of superiority is there internationally? Nothing these days dominates to the extent either of these two do.

<sup>4</sup> Though, interestingly enough, young men are offered the opportunity to experience modern, urban life, and only those who choose to return to the anti-modern fold then do so.

Moving beyond the United States, almost all pastoral nomads who are still nomadic – for instance, Maasai in East Africa, Tuareg in the Sahel, Bedouin throughout the Middle East, many Somalis, etc. – can be considered anti-modern. Not only do they reject settlement (or sedentarization), but little of what modernity has to offer accords well with nomadic life. While they certainly avail themselves of some modern implements – like radios, flashlights, batteries, even vehicles – none of these can be said to have appreciably altered their way of life. In a very real sense, so long as they can sustain themselves via their herds they have no interest in changing their existence; they're traditionalists. But again, too, so long as we Westerners are not the ones trying to force them to settle down, these peoples can not be considered *actively* anti-Western.

Here it seems worthwhile to draw a distinction between anti-modern traditionalists who are pursuing an *inherited* way of life (i.e. this is how their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents lived), and others who suddenly *choose* to reject the world in which they were raised (e.g. Ted Kaczynski, Luddites, etc.). As far as the former are concerned, nothing about their rejection of modernity requires them to take up arms against the West. Typically, they are not the least bit interested in proselytizing their way of life. Their aim is not to get us to convert or to submit. Rather, their greatest passion is simply to pursue and preserve their way of life and, ideally, be left alone.

In other words, grant anti-modern traditionalists space, autonomy and the freedom to operate communally and they pose us no threat.

Trouble comes when we either do not allow people to reject us or people want what modernity has to offer *and* are anti-Western. Or, to put this somewhat differently, peoples and factions who want to persist as they are typically try to do so by removing themselves physically, living in marginal environments and/or purposely forgoing lots of things (even if not everything). By maintaining distance they avoid (or control) threats to their communal identity. For most of these people, the fact that they can subsist without us means they do not consider themselves either dependent or plugged in. By contrast, people who cannot subsist (never mind prosper) without modern 'stuff' – people who do not live a separable kind of life, people who depend on electricity, plumbing, telecommunications, modern weapons, etc., which describes most Islamists and all jihadis – *do not* make a separation that makes sense to us. How can they take so much of what the West produces – 'modern' stuff – and then be actively anti-Western? To us they appear to be hypocrites, or ingrates, or both. This is doubtless one reason we assume that, being dependent, they resent and then hate us. But this is *our* read of their motivations.

## **SUPERIORITY: ACCORDING TO WHOSE STANDARD?**

As Americans, we tend to measure worth according to technological prowess and individual freedoms (read: opportunity). Without these we could not have generated the wealth or well-being we have attained. Nor would we be able to keep growing, changing and generating more opportunities – the hallmarks of both democracy and capitalism. But embedded in this is also a self-reinforcing, or internally consistent, logic that may be more peculiar to us as Americans than we suppose: we privilege technology and opportunity because they have privileged us. Because the things by which we measure success have made us successful we consider these the proofs of

success *and* superiority. And the fact that everyone wants so much of what we produce – and consume – we take as further proof that our standards are universal standards.

However, the French (just to pick on them) would hardly agree. According to their sensibilities, *they* set the standard we should all aspire to; they produce superior High Culture. Not only do they know how to live well, but by the criteria of Style, Art, Cuisine, etc. they reign supreme. Of course, Italians might beg to differ, while Swedes and Norwegians would doubtless argue that, in terms of health and *social* well-being, they actually live best. The point is: different peoples judge not only their, but others' worth according to standards that tend to reflect what they most value. Not only do people differ when it comes to *what* they value, but for assertions regarding certain values there are no objective proofs.

It is easy, for instance, to claim technological superiority. That is measurable not only in output or numbers of patents, but in engineering feats, the man-made miracles of modern medicine, or – ultimately – through contests involving weaponry. Claims to superiority through style or High Culture, on the other hand, are harder to prove, though who people emulate and what they buy – or, alternatively, how French or Italian the French and Italians remain – may be considered sufficiently convincing demonstrations of worth. But what, then, of something like moral superiority? What is the gauge for this? What could possibly count across peoples who adhere to different moral codes? For those who are religious, for instance, the only real proofs of moral rectitude come with Divine Judgment. And while different peoples might view natural disasters like tsunamis, earthquakes, or floods as signs, are these warnings or punishments? Not even that can be answered with any certainty.

I raise the issue of moral superiority because for those for whom *this* is the yardstick by which superiority is measured, we will never prove ourselves superior or even equal according to *their* standards. This is what we are up against not only with Islamists, but potentially all Muslims who hold their faith dear.

A peasant who lives in a mud hut will consider himself superior to us.

Meanwhile, Muslims make a whole range of separations that we do not: men and women are not the same, therefore should not be treated the same. Ditto for 'people of the book' and infidels. But also, if material well-being does not prove moral worth and if there is no moral imperative to promote equal opportunities for all, then what do our measures for success – or the connections we see between our values and our productivity – mean to them? Nothing. Far more compelling is the notion that *as* our moral superiors they deserve whatever it is we are clever enough to design, make, and build.

We err when we assume that we can seduce people into adopting our values by adopting our stuff. There is virtually no evidence that in the non-Christian, non-West this works. If it did, there would no longer be a non-Christian, non-West.

Can *individuals* be seduced? Absolutely, and this is part of what confuses us. For instance, I was recently asked why Islamists fear what we peddle if they are so sure of their values. Or, as I have heard officers say: if Muslims do not like what we sell, they do not have to buy it, which,

though it is true, is also simplistic. How can any set of people know what they do not like until they have seen it? – unless they are kids, in which case they *will not* know better and do require protection.

Adults everywhere aim to guard children from harm until they can fend it off for themselves. Nor is it a coincidence that this protection generally ends once adolescents' identity has gelled. Adults seldom worry about other adults being unwillingly or unknowingly corrupted by outside influences. The assumption is that adults can think for themselves and can understand the consequences of their actions. But also, by the time individuals reach adulthood they are expected to fully understand who they are, to whom they belong, what their rights, roles, and responsibilities are not just in a quotidian, but in an existential sense.

Here is where Islamists have been ingenious in their use of *madrastas* – which are total social institutions. From our perspective, *madrastas* serve to indoctrinate or socialize Muslim youth. But from an Islamist perspective they do not just socialize, they protect, and *preemptively* protect by spiritually arming Muslims. They do so not just by shaping young minds, but by training souls. In other words, religious education offers more than secular education ever will, thereby guaranteeing its graduates greater *self*-assurance, along with certainty about what (and not just who) is morally correct.

It is altogether too self-serving for us to believe that Muslims (and others) resent us because our successes make them feel inferior. Just the opposite would seem to be the case: they resent us because we do not accord them their due, and do not recognize Islam as the morally superior faith.<sup>5</sup>

This is where 'traditionalist' doesn't quite capture Nativists' motives. In case after case, those who have fought westernization have done so not just because they do not want to change, but because they consider their way of life, their beliefs, and their morals to be superior. Nobody rallied more American Indians to stand firm against whites than Techumseh, a Shawnee, of whom it has been said: the "constant, crucial ambition of Shawnee was to remain Shawnee, which they were unshakably convinced was much better than being anyone else."<sup>6</sup> Clearly, this was not true for all Shawnee, since some willingly assimilated. But it is what drove Techumseh to fight to his death. Ditto for legions of other Indian leaders. Or, better to fight for being able to die as an Indian than surrender and become something else.

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<sup>5</sup> I *think* (but cannot say for sure) that 'superiority' is something Christians likewise feel, but it is not built into most Christian religions in the same way it is in Islam, where Muhammad was the last Prophet and the seal on further revelations. In other words, for Muslims Islam is the culmination – and *according to God himself* has no peers.

<sup>6</sup> Bil Gilbert, *God Gave Us This Country: Tekamthi and the First American Civil War* (Anchor Books, 1990), p. 51.

## **AMERICAN AMBIVALENCE, ISLAMIST CERTITUDE**

*Submission* is a critical concept. How can any group of people who are sure of their moral superiority ever submit to anyone else's *moral* code? Civil authority yes, but only so long as this does not contradict religious precepts.

This issue of submission and moral superiority lies at the heart of the struggle between Islamists and the West, which – tellingly – no Westerner in a position of power dares mention. Nor is it as though history suggests any arena in which such a struggle can be peaceably worked out.

I use the term 'struggle' rather than 'clash of civilizations' for two reasons. As will be described below, Islamists and the West (or even the United States) are not comparable units of analysis, but also 'civilization' is too imprecise and loaded a term, while 'clash' implies that both sides must have agreed to meet on the field of battle. Yet, in this case, neither 'side' is fully a side yet. There are struggles within the West as well as among Muslims over what has transpired thus far, and what should (or should not) occur in the future. Moderates *appear* to be up for grabs, which is one complicating factor – complicating because in the West we mistakenly assume moderates matter more than they actually do. While they might well vote, unless they are willing to speak or act with as much passion as partisans, moderates do not viscerally grab anyone's attention, let alone galvanize youth, or sway public opinion.<sup>7</sup> Only radicals and populists do that. Or, to be blunt, so long as they remain moderate and will not fight, moderates are useful as ballast at best.

We Americans also have other self-perception problems. For instance, to return to the subject of superiority, our attitudes about ourselves are quite imperial: virtually all imperial powers have been driven by confidence in their technological and military might and the conviction that they are morally superior. Yet our behavior toward others is not the least bit imperial: we are not comfortable swallowing extant peoples, allowing them to remain themselves, ruling them indirectly, and treating them as lessers. Our ideals do not allow this. Instead, we are inclusive and egalitarian; we want everyone to adopt our values; we will assimilate individuals from absolutely anywhere. However, this also means we are somewhat schizophrenic, since on the one hand we are wedded to egalitarian ideals, but on the other we are equally committed to staying on top in order to ensure that these ideals – and *our* freedoms – remain secure. This means we are not really cultural relativists. Indeed, multiculturalism is only really fine so long as it involves individuals choosing what heritage(s) to feel proud about. Anything much beyond that and 'culture wars' ensue. Moral relativism poses even greater problems. We see this especially clearly in the recent partisanship over Supreme Court nominations: the fact so many morally fraught issues require arbitration should tell us something about our discomfort with competing moral codes.

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<sup>7</sup> Clearly, moderates also matter as the parents, spouses, siblings, etc. of soldiers, potential draftees and so on. But here is where I would simply say no President has used the bully pulpit to its fullest potential in recent years, thereby ceding all sorts of ground to pundits and partisans instead. One vivid example of this: President Clinton could have just as easily rallied the nation to make good on the blood shed in Somalia (after the Blackhawk Down events) as call for our retreat.

Now, compare our ambivalence with Islamists' certitude.

Actually, the comparison may not be fair because who, exactly, we are and what we are defending – secularism? ecumenicism? pluralism? – is not clear. Even if we agree with the Huntingtonian argument that our foundational American Creed is Protestant, not even Protestantism, never mind Christianity, is Islam's equivalent.

What do I mean? Islam's definitional beliefs and practices are substantively the same from Morocco to Malaysia. All Muslims recognize the Five Pillars of Islam, and share practices that are recognizably Muslim to other Muslims. This does not hold for Christians. Christianity is not a unitary religion. Baptism, Episcopalianism, Mormonism, Methodism, Lutheranism... those are all religions. But there is no single practice that ties all Christians together. Nor is there a single agreed upon text. This is significant because it means there is an inherent or internal consistency to Islam – despite the Sunni/Shiite or Sufi splits – that, at least in theory, makes Muslims impossible to permanently fracture along religious lines. Not so Christians. More to the point still, if Islam is incontestably morally superior and, as a consequence, has no equals, and thus Muslims have no equals, what could possibly convince devout – not just extremist, but devout – Muslims they should become more like us?

If we throw this back into the rubric of internally consistent logics, it is virtually impossible to convince people that they are wrong (or misguided) regarding anything undisprovable. For instance, someone who scoffs at the existence of Bigfoot or aliens and can discount all the evidence that believers muster can be 'converted' overnight should Bigfoot or aliens suddenly make contact. However, when it comes to *believers*, what evidence can skeptics offer to make them dis-believe? Or, take the existence of God: a lack of evidence never counts as no evidence for those who believe God owes us no proofs. And though some people, even maybe lots of people, will shed their faith after a catastrophic event, there will always be some who, again, read this as a test – especially if severe tests of faith occurred in the past, and particularly when they are described in scripture itself.

Here, again, is where religion or faith is not like ideology. Faith cannot be disproved, and especially not when it has inoculated itself against skeptics, disasters and other distractions. This is why we also have to understand that to attack *or* invoke it as an obstacle – even to attempt to discredit certain aspects of it – will only fan the flames.

## **CANALIZE AND DIVERT**

In contrast to Islam, Communism is an ideology. But also if we compare Soviet and Islamist *anti-westernization* we should see just how different, and how much harder Islamism is to target, let alone defeat.

During the Cold War we competed against the Soviets over the same things in a wide range of arenas: sports, space, underwater. Because we each were striving to prove whose political economy or system was better the Soviets *could not* use our technology (not that they did not steal blueprints and plans). The rivalry was instead played out in who could out-invent and out-produce whom. Who could provide better services to its population? Who could reach the moon

faster? Who had less crime, better health care, more lethal weapons, etc.? Along practically every dimension the contest came down to tangibles. Or, perhaps a better way to put this is that tangibles were the measure of effectiveness that both sides – and all would-be allies – used. This, as much as anything, helped render the competition surprisingly reciprocal. In fact, even espionage appeared to be relentlessly symmetrical, and thus easy to spoof.

No such reciprocities exist with Islamists.

Also, with minds as our targets in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, cognitive dissonance provided an invaluable lever. For instance, the shoddier their goods relative to ours, the more bankrupt we could make governments appear. Unfortunately, Islamists are not Islamists by virtue of cognition. Nor are they kept Muslims by force. Virtue itself plays a role. Souls are key.

There is nothing we can do to target souls without challenging Islam as a religion. Do this, though, and we might as well embark on a full-blown, old-fashioned crusade.

Actually, promoting any change, even when couched as liberation, is problematic. But it is particularly dangerous to do so when we are overt about what we want people to adopt. No matter how many people tell us they want to be free, pushing our values implies that theirs are no good.<sup>8</sup> We could not hand Islamists any more useful moral ammunition if we tried.

Ironically, no matter how hard it is to figure out what we should do, what we should not is fairly obvious and flies in the face of much that is being bruited about Washington these days. Take gender equity, for instance. The more loudly Thomas Friedman, Ralph Peters, Tom Barnett, and others beat the drum for Muslim women's liberation, the more actively anti-Western they force Nativists to become. You cannot threaten others' moral sensibilities and not expect a violent response. And while in theory it might seem that liberated Muslim women will raise tolerant, pro-Western Muslim sons, when those sons find themselves pitted against traditionalists and *their* sons who will win? Who will fight?

Moderates – by definition – are never ruthless enough to defeat those bent on using violence to cleanse and purify. We are being unrealistic to assume that we can inspire moderate Muslims to take up cudgels in our defense. In the long history of Islam, I know of no case when cleansers did not eventually prevail.<sup>9</sup> How can they not? –when they thrive on hardship, asceticism, the romance of self-sacrifice, and total dedication to a Cause, and not just any cause, but a Righteous Cause.

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<sup>8</sup> This comes through again and again in Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War* (Henry Holt, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> It could be that history has not recorded the failures.

Only one potential counter comes to mind : ruthlessly nationalist security forces. It is unclear whether members of the Turkish, Algerian, and Egyptian security forces should be considered Muslim ‘moderates,’ but they certainly are not Islamists. Having said this, though, who ultimately outlasts whom remains to be seen. Iran, too, had what appeared to be ruthlessly nationalist security forces once upon a time.<sup>10</sup>

While Islamists’ purifying impulse is not just a consequence of westernization – the need to purify is integral to Islam and is called for or sanctioned whenever corruption, laziness, or complacency takes hold – what we are seeing today *is* a reaction to westernization and western influence. Even for those Islamists who seek to oust corrupt regimes, regimes are believed to be corrupt thanks to us – and are in power in countries that only exist thanks to Western map-drawing and imperialism.

Without westernization (or some other pressure from without) Nativism never would have arisen in most societies; there would have been no need to call for reform. In contrast, the Muslim urge to purify Islam dates back to the 700s, which means it is more robust, more practiced, and far more deep-seated than any other form of resistance we are familiar with. In fact, it is not really resistance; it is something more. It is pro-active and aggressive. Nor is it likely to dissipate until Islamists feel the House of Islam has been put right.

Significantly, too, Iran’s failures have not proved disheartening to those who seek Islamic rule. Unfulfillable promises there have not dampened *Iraqi* Shiite ardor for religious governance. This almost suggests that we should want Islamists to triumph in several states at the same time. Then, if they do not burn themselves out trying to govern, they might at least do so competing against one another over who does Islam best.

While this is hardly something we are likely to encourage, it would at least divert Islamist attention from us. We need to do *something* to canalize Islamists – which is one reason I suggest finding something to pre-occupy youth, and why we need to do everything we can to foster *a-religious* divides. It is critical that we recognize that for Muslims partisan about Islam, Muslims cannot adopt our *moral* values and still remain Muslim.

To sever the link between anti-westernization, and anti-westernization and violence, may well require that we also grant Muslims space, autonomy and the freedom to operate communally, according to their moral code – no matter how immoral we find it. This, after all, is what most traditionalists have managed to wrest for themselves. The difference is we would have to grant and then guarantee this to Muslims who, unlike most other Nativists, do not live in some far-removed corner somewhere. Otherwise, what are the alternatives? To *forcibly* westernize all Muslims everywhere, obliterate them, or tolerate al-Qaeda-like attacks in perpetuity. None of these seems very doable, let alone survivable by us.

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<sup>10</sup> I use ‘appeared’ on purpose. This is based on limited reading, not research.

If we did adopt an approach whereby we both encouraged a-religious discord among ‘them’ *and* returned to our roots (of being a Promised Land rather than a Crusader State), we could easily offer refuge to anyone who would rather live under our rule of law as opposed to *sharia*. But at the same time, we should also promote less public inclusiveness and ecumenicism here at home – not less tolerance, but less bending-over-backwards to *publicly* accommodate all faiths. Counter-intuitive as it sounds, reaffirming our Biblical heritage, and thereby our Judaeo-Christian Westernness *and* our distinctiveness, would actually grant Muslims more leeway to remain Muslim elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> The same could well apply to our eventual relations with the Chinese, or any other set of non-Westerners. The less the lines are blurred the better – and the more canalized terror, and conflict in general, should remain.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> A number of people make similar points, but to somewhat different ends: Samuel Huntington, Robert Merry, George Weigel.

<sup>12</sup> There is an entirely separate, but related argument to be made for how this would also help our troops when they are deployed abroad. By only having to act American, they would always know how to behave. Likewise, non-Americans would always know what to expect and to what standard to hold them (and us).

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# I. ADOLESCENCE

Organized violence might not exist, and certainly could not persist for long, without young males. This simple fact goes unsaid too often. If there were not available young men levels of violence in Afghanistan and Iraq would plummet. But also, if young men were not attracted to violence levels would not be so high. Meanwhile, arguments that assume that adolescent males act violently only because they feel alienated, bitter, frustrated, or even just anxious ignore historical evidence. Violence surely offers a release for rage, resentment, repression, pent-up hormonal urges and the list goes on. Without question, too, aggression is instrumentally useful, earning those who are good at it loot, booty, girlfriends, sex, admiration, higher status, respect, etc. But it is also not as though weapons and the instruments of violence themselves do not hold a certain fascination. Nor is it as though adrenaline is not fun.

We would do much better to approach the young male-organized violence nexus by reconsidering adolescence. As Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox noted decades ago, there is a universal bio-grammar to all human societies.<sup>13</sup> Ideally, adolescence represents the period during which young males are supposed to rebel in order that they can be socialized. Cleverly constructed societies channel male aggression (and *angst*) outward and/or into institutions (e.g. warriorhood, monasteries, universities) where they can do little social harm but still test all sorts of limits: the limits of their capabilities, others' reactions, where they belong in the pecking order, what women make of them, what to make of women, etc. Because learning how to lead and follow – or maneuver, manipulate and respond to social dynamics – can only really be done among peers, young men group. For better or worse, groups generate their own sets of internal tensions which, in communal societies especially, means there is no escape. In these settings youth are hemmed in by a finite number of future roles, set societal expectations, a pre-determined cast of adults *and* peers who will remain peers for life. This may help explain the difference in mutual expectations among young adults raised in places like Pakistan vs. young adults raised in more atomizing environments like Lackawanna or Leeds and the yearning that the latter often feel for attaining what the former seem to have.

As for emotions stirred up during adolescence, it is not clear that many are all that new or different from those felt during childhood, though it would appear we feel all of them more acutely, intensely and associated with more and different targets – whether disgust, humiliation, outrage, the need to prove ourselves and be taken more seriously, or desire, love, compassion and the need to be useful. Physicality takes on a new urgency for males especially. So does intensity, so much so that sometimes it is sought for its own sake – ergo drugs – though quests on behalf of Causes can prove equally consuming.

Just 'having' or collecting experiences helps. Different experiences not only help youth learn, but also may allow them to establish track records. Handled correctly, any type of experience can be counted as an achievement. Experiences earn youth bragging rights and, transformed into

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<sup>13</sup> Lionel Tiger & Robin Fox, *The Imperial Animal* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1997 [1971]).

war stories, help impress peers or girls (as well as other key audiences: younger kids and older men). But storytelling also fuels one-upmanship. With the glue for virtually all groups being shared experiences, the more hardship, misery, daring and even foolishness that is shared the better. Danger helps. So does skirting the edge of what is societally allowed. Illicitness holds definite cachet, while in tandem secrecy and camaraderie reinforce each other's mystique.

Camaraderie is both much simpler and more complex than is often realized. First, it provides purpose. Second, group dynamics act as a goad to experimentation. Third, strength in numbers makes potential consequences seem less consequential. In a sense, and because they focus on the future not the past, adolescents are all about progress: novelty is not just good, but the highest good. To belong to a group solves the problem of what to do, while doing stuff – anything – helps generate the next idea and, ultimately, the next 'adventure.' Vandalism is one typical kind of by-product; it provides a rush of excitement for individuals, an activity for the group, and memories to bond by. *What* is destroyed is largely immaterial.<sup>14</sup> *Why* is even harder to explain except 'it seemed like a good idea at the time.'<sup>15</sup>

Given the importance of belonging to a group it is small wonder that one of the most difficult balancing acts in adolescence is learning how to stand out *and* fit in. No one wants to be odd man out. To avoid such a fate requires conforming. Yet, to be indispensable one has to bring something of one's own to the table, too. No formula exists for how to pull off being different but not too different and similar but not too similar to others in the group when every group has a different composition and chemistry. This is why so much of what adolescent males learn *has* to be experiential.<sup>16</sup> But what camaraderie also makes possible is belonging to something bigger and more important than oneself. Losing oneself to a group or a Cause – and especially in combination – not only helps an individual to transcend the mundane, but also to *feel* significant. Emile Durkheim recognized how critical it is for people to be able to plug into a collective consciousness (or conscience) in the context of religion. This may be all the more important for adolescents, when hormones wreak havoc with mind/body relations, and transcending one's body, one's age, adults' expectations, etc. holds ineffable appeal.

Escape is always possible through art, music, drama, and sports when and if these are available, although they can also prove extremely problematic. To earn recognition and keep advancing one has to be good or sufficiently talented. Otherwise, why continue to compete? 'Why bother?,' a classic teen response to whatever teens cannot or do not want to do signals something else: rejection or rebellion. This is the flip side of sublimating oneself to something large and noble. If we think about how adolescents often view themselves – as trapped between being free but not autonomous (children have few responsibilities but virtually no rights) and being

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<sup>14</sup> In a figurative, not a literal, sense since the bigger and more dramatic the better.

<sup>15</sup> Group members themselves can rarely articulate why they engaged in *that* act of violence at *that* moment in time (as most parents of teenagers know).

<sup>16</sup> Lionel Tiger, *Men in Groups* (New York: Random House, 1969).

autonomous *and* surrounded by rewards (which is how they view adults) – then why *not* try to seize rewards early, by whatever means available? This, certainly, explains some of the allure of crime, war and violence. But on the other hand, why seek material rewards at all? Why not eschew possessions? Asceticism lends itself to even greater flights of self-righteous fancy.<sup>17</sup>

Often adolescents do things just to test the limits of their own potential. How much *can* they feel? And how much can they make others feel? Sometimes, the more someone else *seems* to feel, the more this drives others to imitate his act. Intensity – *the* great evanescent elixir – works a lot like a sump. But on whom it works, how and to what ends, especially in heterogeneous societies, is impossible to predict.

It is wholly possible that *the* motivator for suicide terrorism, for instance, is as simple (but profound and quintessentially adolescent) as “I’ll show you.” But it could also be that suicide on behalf of a Cause represents something so daring, so extreme, so final, and so *explosive* that for those seeking the ultimate, this is it. Because the same act can satisfy any one of a number of feelings or yearnings (yearnings being even more inchoate than feelings), it seems unlikely we will ever figure out what entices or drives Adolescent X to commit Act Y. The trigger could be anything from a personal insult to a televised plight. Herein lies the diabolical cleverness of this method of tapping into adolescents. They are not just prone to violence because violence *seems* to deliver so much of what they want, but they also prime one another.

One would think, given our own lived experience – never mind the historical, cross-cultural record – that we would better appreciate what traditional (especially tribal) societies have long recognized: adolescence itself is a problem. Never mind the litany of things everyone cites today, from globalization through unemployment to the treatment of Palestinians. If those represented the real sources of trouble, traditional societies would never have developed or bothered to perfect lengthy rites of passage and methods of social control to domesticate young men.

Here I do not mean to suggest that grievances do not matter. Rather, the reason they matter so much has everything to do with adolescence.

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<sup>17</sup> As do veganism and numerous forms of environmentalism, which fit with the kind of holier-than-thou attitude adolescents with no real responsibilities can afford to adopt. Alternatively, adolescents who do not have the luxury of being able to reject something they do not have (e.g. lots of stuff) can be just as self-righteous about poverty as a virtue. There is also an age-old religious tie-in here. See Rodney Stark: *For the Glory of God* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 62:

... the emphasis placed on the virtues of poverty by so many of these groups was not a rationalization for *being* poor but a call for Xians to embrace ‘holy poverty’ as the means of overcoming worldliness. The stress was on *choosing* poverty – an option not given to the poor – which may account for the special appeal of asceticism to those in a position to choose. It is frequently observed that wealth fails to satisfy many of those born into privilege...

And, when should we say that adolescence begins and ends? For an anthropologist the answer is obvious: whenever society indicates. Again, most traditional societies demarcate entry and exit with specific rites. Along with new sets of roles, responsibilities, and rewards may come new dietary restrictions, new forms of dress, new codes of behavior, a new place of residence – nothing (tellingly enough) that should not be familiar to members of the military. But as far as most civilians are concerned, there are no clear gates through which young men *must* pass in order to advance.<sup>18</sup> This means that individuals can stay in prolonged (or arrested) adolescence as long as they want and/or are financially able. We see such individuals all around us today, not just in this country, but in the middle class worldwide. And if we look back at social rebels and revolutionaries through time, most caught fire when they were young and then remained firebrands their entire lives. Either nothing came along to force them to shift focus, or they were able to overcome whatever objections society threw at them, or they lived a split life and society did not care (as long as they acted responsibly in some spheres).

We are all familiar with the division of labor that generally results: as rebels age they instigate rather than participate in violence. They theorize and rationalize, finance, orchestrate and direct. This characterization is not entirely fair since intellectuals might never have engaged in violence, while former thugs may still routinely participate in violent acts, but basically we see the same patterns over time and across cultures. One obvious conclusion is that this must be because age affects males in similar ways. If so, then perhaps the best societies can do *is* to redirect male energy when (and as) it spikes. But while this might seem to get us closer to a solution – harness male youth for constructive purposes – it ignores the second of our enablers which is independent of age: the urge to factionalize.

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<sup>18</sup> For a longer argument about this, see Anna Simons, “Mobilizable Male Youth, Indigenous Institutions, and War” (paper presented at 2002 VAD Conference, Leipzig, Germany).

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## II. FACTIONALIZATION

Young males are not the only ones to group; they simply behave differently in groups than when they mix with the rest of us.<sup>19</sup>

All societies are riven by factions. Factions are a consequence of personal rivalries writ *into* principles.<sup>20</sup> It does not matter which, in reality, comes first: genuine disagreement or inter-personal antipathy. Actors themselves may not know. But the process is clear: to make something out of a rivalry, to create and/or rally a faction, means Person A *has* to oppose something associated with Person B – a position, belief, *something* that he can point to as significantly, discernibly different. Significance, difference and discernability are all important. To attract and retain supporters, Person A and his lieutenants *have* to ensure that others can see for themselves that B's differences from them do matter. Ideally, these should matter in substantive or symbolically resonant ways.<sup>21</sup>

Another way to explain the dynamic is to consider two factions. Because members of A hate members of B *on principle*, members of A should dislike everything members of B stand for. But members of A are only likely to attract recruits and allies if they can de-personalize and then moralize what is at stake. Once 'on principle' is turned into '*for the sake of principle*' potential friends do not have to have direct experience with A's enemies to be asked for support. But also, with the shift from hating people for no good reason to hating them *for* good reason, it is just a short slide to being able to dehumanize them altogether and slaughter them in the tens of thousands. We will come back to other notions that help make this possible. For now let me just point out how circular the process of factionalization proves to be since, over time, it is easy for members of A to convince themselves (and their children, never mind potential allies) that it is B's *principles* that make them deserving of hate.<sup>22</sup>

We see this in the schisms that have wracked Christianity, as well as in splits among social revolutionaries. It certainly holds true in academia, which should not be surprising since to produce conflict out of the 'narcissism of small differences' takes considerable intellectualizing, rationalizing and justifying. If one tries to step back and objectively consider the early debates within the Church, for instance, or between the Church and the Lutherans, or the Lutherans and the Reformed Church it is hard not to conclude that initial battles were fought over relatively arbitrary issues. Why care more about transubstantiation than Immaculate Conception, or baptism than predestination? The amount of time, effort and single-mindedness that was devoted

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<sup>19</sup> A point made most famously by Lionel Tiger.

<sup>20</sup> My definition.

<sup>21</sup> Often, of course, symbols that resonate over time become substantive to people – e.g. the Stars and Bars.

<sup>22</sup> Here I mean hate – and not disdain, marginalization, proselytization, or change.

to turning just one matter into a breakpoint is astounding. No less impressive is the relentlessness of the logic that was applied by each side, suggesting that theologians and Church intellectuals were able to find some point on which they wanted to differ from others whom they knew would differ from them.

It is understandably difficult to find personal rivalry cited as the impetus for factionalization. Among other things, this would make defenders of difference seem too petty and insufficiently principled. But finding examples of rivalry at work once factions exist is easy. For instance:

...it was what Calvin or the Reformed believed that decided what mainstream Lutheranism would pronounce as orthodoxy. If Calvin had affirmed it, then they were against it (although naturally this was not how they argued in public or in print).<sup>23</sup>

Or, because the English sought to exploit the Irish, the Irish were bound to stick to their Catholicism.<sup>24</sup> Such reactions are so commonplace that we tend to accept the fact that when one group tries to subjugate or influence another there is bound to be resistance. What we pay less attention to is what is used. Or, when we do pay attention we assume that something *is* being used, and that it does not necessarily, or never did, matter as much as people *now* believe it always did.<sup>25</sup> For instance, the more 19<sup>th</sup> century French *philosophes* and others looked to Rome, the more their British and German counterparts looked to Greece for inspiration.<sup>26</sup> Each side was thus using one set of differences to sharpen another, though neither Rome nor Greece had been very important previously.<sup>27</sup>

Mau Mau, in contrast, offers an example of what happens when a difference that always mattered suddenly matters more. In the mid-1900s Christian missionaries attempted to squelch certain local practices – like female circumcision – among the Kikuyu in Kenya. This turned female circumcision into a rallying point, and actually became one of the sparks that led to the Mau Mau rebellion. But on closer examination what else do we find? Factions. Some Kikuyu were Christian and others were becoming Christian. Christianization posed a clear threat to local healers and other purveyors of local traditions. Without question they had a vested interest in maintaining the old ways, so of course we would expect them to fight back. Likewise we might

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<sup>23</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Viking, 2003), 341.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>25</sup> A point made most famously by E.J. Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger in their edited collection, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>26</sup> David Gress, *From NATO to Plato: The Idea of the West and Its Opponents* (New York: The Free Press, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> This is particularly acute among tribal societies. See Ian Hodder, *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archeology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

expect traditionalists to make more of traditions than usual, both to rally people and to prove themselves essential. However, some Kikuyus' willingness to become Christian should also hint at something more: everything could not have been "hunky-dory" prior to the missionaries' arrival. The potential for factionalization was clearly already present. All the missionaries did was introduce a new issue over which factions could coalesce.

There were actually plenty of such issues at the time. No less threatening than Christianization was land tenure, how land was being commodified, monetization, etc. Faced with an onslaught that suddenly encouraged all kinds of individual choice and, worse, competition, what else could traditionalists do to maintain unity *but* heighten and emphasize tradition? Nor was it as though change itself was the issue – this implies that Kikuyu had always been as they were and had never adopted new practices, something that does not hold for any group of people anywhere. Instead, it was *what* was to be changed that mattered. This also explains why female circumcision proved such a sticking point.

Kikuyu traditions were critical to keeping Kikuyu Kikuyu – not just in the minds of traditionalists, but clearly in the minds of missionaries and westernizers. Abandon traditions and what *would* distinguish Kikuyu from anyone else? Identity is always a matter of practices in addition to values and beliefs; how else make values and beliefs visible? In fact, this is exactly what female circumcision helped do: it literally and figuratively marked young women *as* Kikuyu and distinguished them from the uncircumcised, unclean, lesser members of neighboring tribes. Corporate integrity was thus tied to this rite, as was the long-term health and fertility of the community.

Threaten a critical practice, in other words imperil corporate integrity, and you suddenly make visible a split over who values these things more. The potential for a split already exists. This is the pattern that produces traditionalists everywhere.

We see this especially clearly in American Indian history. American Indians were divided against themselves not just on principle, and certainly not just thanks to outsiders, but according to blood ties and family relationships. Some families stuck together no matter what. Issues simply gave them something to organize around; otherwise, why rally? Essentially, whichever faction decided to be accommodationist first guaranteed that its rivals turn traditionalist or nativist. Obviously, those willing to abandon their Indian identity were not particularly committed to traditions in the first place, while it was particularly ideal that it was outsiders who provided the choices since wanting no choice made traditionalism the perfect default (and the ultimate counter-option).<sup>28</sup> For instance, consider this description of the Iroquois in the early 1800s:

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<sup>28</sup> Worth noting is that American authorities not only recognized the significance of intra- (and not just inter-) tribal factionalism, but used it to advantage as often as they could. Whenever Nativists attempted to organize any sort of pan-Indian movement, the government supported regionally or tribally based movements. This was done deliberately to keep Indians divided. See Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), xx.

... emotion drove many of the members of the pagan party into extremely nativistic positions. Since the missionaries were demanding the abandonment of an Indian identity and calling the conservatives by the opprobrious term 'pagan,' some of those who chose to retain pride in being Iroquois felt forced to oppose everything any missionary proposed – not merely psalm-singing and sabbath-keeping, but also secular schooling and even further material improvements.<sup>29</sup>

Or to be even more schematic about it: once accommodationists offended communal sensibilities, nativists were duty-bound to defend against accommodation.

These splits survive on reservations to this day. We are also seeing them abroad. Let us say members of family A or clan B in Iraq or Afghanistan want democracy (or want to side with us, or simply want to work with us). This essentially guarantees that Faction B, to oppose them, will oppose democracy and everything associated with it (and us), and will turn increasingly nativist in the process.

How can nativism – and traditions more specifically – possibly attract young men? Or are young men simply responding to opportunity and whatever loot and glory violence might gain them? In the case of the Indian Wars, young male participation certainly cannot be blamed on disenfranchisement, alienation, or frustration; it was not as though young warriors turned to warfare because they could not find jobs. In their case, they would not have wanted jobs, which is surely part of what they were fighting against. But were they only fighting *against*? Couldn't they also have been fighting *for* something larger and nobler than immediate gratification – like a way of life which was not just *a* way of life, but the Right Way, and one thereby worth dying for?<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Anthony Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972 [1969]), 331.

<sup>30</sup> That this way of life also glorified warriorhood would clearly have been one important reason they were so keen to defend it.

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### III. WESTERNIZATION

This is very circular. But so is Identity and what it gets attached to. We need to be clear: nativism is not a reaction against change *per se*. It is a response to accommodationists – those who are willing *to* change – and to what accommodationists imperil in their rivals' eyes. Secular power, yes, but also transcendent power associated with certain traditions and values, to include valuing community over self.<sup>31</sup>

Consider: everything we currently value in the West – democracy, capitalism, what has gotten us to the 'end of history,' the notion of *universal* human rights, and so on – flows from or is built on our notion that the individual should be the unit of account.<sup>32</sup> Exploration, science, none of the things we consider integral to the development of the West would have been likely had individuals not been encouraged to compete against one another. Nor could personal progress have become our greatest collective ambition.

As David Gress points out in his history of 'the West,' this can take a pathological turn. What he describes as an "acquisitive mentality combined with the tendency to view everything through quantitative, economic spectacles, to consider economic value the only value, and to see profits and revenue as ends in themselves, to be pursued at all costs and beyond all limits" is completely antithetical to maintaining harmony, which is the preeminent goal in tradition-oriented societies.<sup>33</sup> Even the most benign version of liberal capitalism generates problems for societies where redistribution rather than accumulation is supposed to be the highest good, conspicuous display of anything is frowned upon and individual well-being is secondary to the well-being of the group. These values keep a society coherent. Western values may keep individuals all heading in the same general direction – forward – but they do not tie people together in nearly the same way.

We underestimate the importance of solidarity as an ideal – an ideal that, factionalization suggests, will always matter to some members of the group more than to others.<sup>34</sup> The great social scientists – Durkheim, Marx, Weber, Simmel, Tonnies – picked up on the radical disjunctions introduced by changes in scale, from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*, or village to city.

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<sup>31</sup> Again, this works especially well when defending the community can bring glory *to* the self.

<sup>32</sup> One could probably trace this all the way back to Jesus, who was the ultimate selfless Individual. This could also help explain why Christians and Westerners have been able to reach a much more freewheeling accommodation regarding secularization than, say, Muslims have, since Christianity itself is predicated on all sorts of notions about individual free will, salvation, sin, etc. The 'community of faithful' does not loom quite so large.

<sup>33</sup> Gress, *From NATO to Plato*, 318.

<sup>34</sup> The threat to people's ability to continue to do what they *need* to in order to remain who they are clearly separates those who want to stay who they are from those who do not.

But they did not apply their insights to westernization of non-Westerners. Clearly, westernization's effects differ in different places, but the same overall principles apply: generally speaking, people are much more likely to *absorb* practices piecemeal, at their own pace, so long as they can do so without feeling themselves *fundamentally* changing. This has several implications. For one, it means *entire societies* never acculturate on their own. Either some coercive authority from without or from on high, or alternatively some faction from within, has to apply pressure. But then, as soon as force *is* felt, as soon as some portion of the community begins to peel away, or even shift and change, thereby threatening the corporate 'whole,' traditionalists react and/or people turn to traditionalists in order to help them resist.

Westernization produces some variant of these effects everywhere. The catch is that westernization also represents the most consistently aggressive, but only fitfully violent, transformative force in human history. This means the threshold for people recognizing that they have changed (or been changed) too much – from what they were into something else – is hard for them to detect. Once on this slippery slope, it cannot be clear when the point of no return is reached, just as it is not clear when harmony can no longer be restored (harmony or consensus, not unilinear progress, being the goal). All societies have mechanisms for dealing with acute crises, and for restoring relations after acute or sudden ruptures. Few societies have mechanisms for dealing with prolonged crisis. Once *down* the slippery slope, fewer still know how to restore themselves.

When confronted with such a threat, people typically turn backwards *and* outwards. Invariably there will be a call by traditionalists for purification – of people, rites, instruments – to attempt to restore what was. At the same time, because the crisis is new there is always some degree of syncretism. What this means is that people bent on not changing will wind up changing certain things in order to not have to change what they regard as most sacred or essential. Thus, what outsiders often consider hypocritical is not; traditionalists will not throw away everything from the West, just anything they believe disrupts social relations and thereby morally or spiritually endangers them. As a process this takes time. Here is where traditionalists typically encounter difficulties. We see this especially clearly, again, in American Indian history:

'Traditional' Eastern Woodlands cultures did not set themselves in opposition to change; indeed, the main story in the colonial period is that of adaptation. But for nativists, acceptable changes were to come through traditionally sanctioned means. By 1800, one of the requisites for such sanction was Indian control. Nativism meant, in this context, not the conservation of a current tradition, or revitalization of a dead or dying culture, but independence of, and resistance to, direct intervention by the American republic.<sup>35</sup>

Given the realities of the day, control was impossible. Even so, Indians put up a considerable fight

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<sup>35</sup> Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*, 129.

Indian prophets arose not singly but in groups, and in doing so they integrated dissidents of various peoples into far-flung and often militant networks... The shared understanding, by peoples of widely separated regions, of symbols whose meanings sprang out of deeper understandings of the workings of the world, provided an essential principle for the pan-Indian movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The principle was that the power of the British and Anglo-American invaders could be met with sacred power.<sup>36</sup>

This should sound familiar. It could almost be a description of al-Qaeda. But why? Are Muslims really the new Indians?

The short answer is: no, and if we treat them as though they are we will be making a major mistake. The longer answer involves recasting the question. What we should really want to know is why we are eliciting a Nativist response – if, in fact, that is what the Islamist response is.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, xix.

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## IV. WHY ISLAM?

One argument is that what Islamists fear from westernization is not conversion, but the diminishment of Islam. Islamists do not want to see Muslims treat Islam the way Christians treat Christianity. They worry that young Arabs will adopt “the typical Western attitude to religion... This means, first of all, that they learn to consider Islam not as a total way of life,” but instead split it off from secular pursuits:

While this dichotomy is in itself a sin, because it removes part of human life from divine guidance, still worse is the development which inevitably follows and which leads to a progressive expansion of the secular area of life at the expense of the religious... [leading to] a duplication of what has happened in the West: a complete subordination of all human endeavor to materialistic goals, with a corresponding total abandonment of religion and the morality it teaches.<sup>37</sup>

If we pay attention to what Islamists reject – a scientific world view, a tolerant attitude toward the belief of others, acceptance of women as equals<sup>38</sup> – we find clear connections between values and social relations, two elements that help define Muslim identity *and* distinguish Islam as far as Islamists are concerned.

The French anthropologist Emmanuel Todd explores the tightness of these linkages more boldly than most.<sup>39</sup> According to Todd, “once removed from its anthropological vector, a religion loses its strength and its ability to resist other doctrines.”<sup>40</sup> In Todd’s view, the anthropological vector for Muslims is ‘the endogamous community family.’<sup>41</sup> Whether his specific characterization is

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<sup>37</sup> Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind*, rev. ed., (New York: Hatherleigh Press, 2002 [1976]), 304.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Cook, *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 29.

<sup>39</sup> See Emmanuel Todd, *The Explanation of Ideology: Family Structures and Social Systems*, trans. David Garrioch, (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985). Todd argues, for instance, that “the Christian world embodied the ideal of exogamy, the Muslim world that of endogamy. Two monotheistic forms of universalism confronted each other, trapped by an anthropological difference” (136). Consequent family structure and inheritance rules have had all sorts of impacts on compatibility and incompatibility with different regime types. Essentially, the western-style state cannot work well for Muslims (144). Unfortunately, because Todd talks about ideal-types, but then generalizes so sweepingly, his claims are not always credible. He also focuses too exclusively on family structure.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 133: “1) equality between brothers established by inheritance rules; 2) cohabitation of married sons with their parents; 3) frequent marriage between the children of brothers. Principal regions: Arab world, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan – hardly the ‘Muslim world.’”

correct, genealogy (or kinship) has long been critical to Arabs' identity. Muhammad himself recognized this. And because he did, genealogy *has* become important to Muslims, with as many families trying to trace their descent back to him or his Helpers as legitimately can. It is thus no coincidence that extended families or lineages, not individuals, remain the unit of account *and* accountability throughout the Middle East and beyond. Islam does nothing to break down communal bonds;<sup>42</sup> at the very least it seeks to expand them to the entire *umma*, and bloodprice, bridewealth, honor killings, and other customary institutions bear witness to collective obligations and responsibilities, regardless of whatever statutes may exist on paper.

From this perspective it should be evident that individuation – westernization's vector – threatens nothing less than the primacy of the group over the individual and thereby *Islam's* vector.

Islamists do not explain their nativism in these terms. They would not, any more than they would want to call attention to the Great Family rivalries that underwrite 'principled' political positions throughout the Middle East. As for our Americanesque explanations, they are varied, but consistent. For instance, from right of center:

The antagonism of Muslims toward the United States stems in part from American support for Israel. It also has deeper roots in the *fear of* American power, *envy of* American wealth, *resentment of* what is perceived as American domination and exploitation, and *hostility to* American culture, secular and religious, as the antithesis of Muslim culture (emphasis mine).<sup>43</sup>

From the center:

Bin Laden's style of *hatred* will be seen as one of history's dead ends and it will survive, if it survives at all, among isolated communities of *alienated*, *powerless*, and *marginal* misanthropes who may hate but do not dare or care to act on that hatred (emphasis mine).<sup>44</sup>

And from the left, on what youth find in Islamism: "satisfaction for their *need for* identity, for affiliation to a group, for spirituality, for a simple interpretation of too complex realities, and for

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<sup>42</sup> This is one reason many Africans, Asians, etc. have such an easy time adopting Islam.

<sup>43</sup> Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 360.

<sup>44</sup> Walter Russell Mead, *Power, Terror, Peace, and War: America's Grand Strategy in a World at Risk* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 172.

action and revolt” (emphasis mine).<sup>45</sup> Add to these humiliation, disillusion, and disappointment and that rounds out what is generally said.

Absent from virtually all of the commentary about Islamists is any intimation that conviction or faith, devotion and duty, let alone anything stronger like ecstasy or rapture might play a role. Fervor is never *for* Islam, but is a consequence of Muslims’ inadequacies *vis à vis* us. What most riles Islamists by their own accounts is seldom discussed. For instance, that many Muslims find Western practices and behaviors disgusting, consider them an affront, and feel disdain – not envy – does not square with what we think they should feel. Consequently, what we miss is why, from within their frame, we amount to a contaminant. Or why, to combat us requires purification and revitalization. Or how this then makes our demonization quite predictable: **they** are doing what Allah has ordained, **we** are trying to divert or tempt them from the True Path, this makes us satanic.

Again, the traditional method for combating evil, whether it comes in the form of temptation, corruption, contamination or pollution is to exorcise and purify.<sup>46</sup> Revitalization itself can serve other purposes. For instance, it can help unite large numbers of people and/or separate the wheat (those weak enough to seek accommodation) from the chaff (those strong enough to fight back), which in turn yields an increasingly self-righteous nativist core that will engage in ever greater acts of cleansing, purification and self-sacrifice. As is frequently pointed out these days, terror is merely a means.

Over time, many American Indians also forewent what Geoffrey Parker calls ‘the etiquette of atrocity’ – and indulged in terror acts. Protestants and Catholics did the same in the Thirty Years Wars. Ditto for French as well as Communist Revolutionaries.<sup>47</sup> The literature suggests that organized forces unleash terror and engage in atrocities for a range of fairly specific reasons.<sup>48</sup> Given long-standing enmities and conflicts, warfare is bound to create its own reciprocities over time such that people come to share rules even across significant cultural divides. But problems do sometimes arise when one side cannot draw its opponent into the kind of battle where it can

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<sup>45</sup> Amin Maalouf, *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*, trans. Barbara Bray, (New York: Penguin, 2000), 90.

<sup>46</sup> Contaminants, moral pollutants, witches, sorcerers... conceptions of what is disrupting social relations may differ, but the ‘cure’ is surprisingly consistent across cultures.

<sup>47</sup> See Barrington Moore, *Moral Purity and Persecution in History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>48</sup> 1) when they are fighting rebels or heretics, 2) when soldiers have been ‘starved of pay,’ 3) when an example needs to be made (this represents the ‘strategic use of terror for expediency’ option), 4) during routs, 5) after sieges – particularly when a summons to surrender had previously been offered and rejected, 6) if the enemy had broken its oath not to fight again, 7) if soldiers saw that captured comrades had been mutilated, and/or 8) if there had been prior atrocities. Geoffrey Parker makes these points in his chapter “The Etiquette of Atrocity” in his book, *Success is Never Final: Empire, War, and Faith in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Basic Books, 2002)

impose its will; then atrocities occur.<sup>49</sup> Also, they are likely under two further sets of circumstances: un-disciplined or ill disciplined forces may engage in one-upmanship among themselves. This would be typical of gangs (vs. armies), not that youth *per se* are always undisciplined. Youth *can* carefully plot, especially when revenge is involved; we should not forget that being able to imagine victims begging for mercy is itself a sort of release, even as it helps ratchet up the level of pain that perpetrators plan to inflict.<sup>50</sup>

Second, etiquette is closely linked to the type of war being fought. If negotiation is possible, then it is better to be nice rather than nasty, not only because you want to negotiate from a position of moral strength, but because the fighting can always recur in the future. If, instead, the war involves identity and the fear is that the group as a group will be wiped out, distinctions between combatants and non-combatants are irrelevant; everyone who represents the other side has to be presumed to pose a threat; ‘no mercy’ makes sense. We see attitudes like these displayed in virtually all religious wars in the past, where the ‘polluting enemy’ was considered “outside the range of human beings to whom one owes the slightest obligation as fellow creatures.”<sup>51</sup>

Given this we might conclude that where notions of moral pollution loom large we should *expect* to see dehumanization and demonization of enemies, atrocities and what we would regard as sickening cruelties. Terrorism, in this regard, may not necessarily signal desperation or a lack of conventional capability only. It could instead reflect a more deep-seated, even biological response to fears of contagion or pollution.<sup>52</sup> Or, of course, all of these things may be related: fear of contagion triggers defense of identity. Imperil others’ corporate integrity and they are bound to regard you as an undifferentiated, alien mass and seek to expel or obliterate you defensively.<sup>53</sup> If they die, too, well, better to have done so honorably and on their own terms.

This does not just describe Kikuyu or Iroquois, but potentially al-Qaeda and other enemies to come. One difference is: people who fought to stay tribal never had exactly what they needed at the right time. Typically, they lacked organizational capacity. Worse, they did not have a pre-

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<sup>49</sup> Harold Selesky, “Colonial America” in Michael Howard, Georg Andreopoulos, and Mark Shulman eds., *The Laws of War: Constraints on Warfare in the Western World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 83.

<sup>50</sup> In general, our teenagers tend to go on very personal rampages.

<sup>51</sup> Moore, *Moral Purity and Persecution in History*, 57. But also Moore, citing Natalie Zemon Davis’ study of religious riots in sixteenth-century France, writes: “According to her findings a frequent goal of the religious riot was ridding the community of dreadful pollution... So long as the rioters maintained a given religious commitment, they rarely displayed shame or guilt for violence. In other words, crowds acting out their beliefs about purity and pollution believed their actions to be legitimate” (51-52).

<sup>52</sup> See Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 212-15, on our concerns about pollution being inherent.

<sup>53</sup> Clearly this is what occurs with – or is made to occur via – ethnic cleansing.

existing ideology or unifying religion that could quickly tie them together across tribal (and thus moral) divides – something that was extremely difficult to cobble together in the face of a moving frontier, which is what confronted American Indians, for instance. Islamists today have all of these means and more, to include methods tested by a range of predecessors.

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## V. LEARNED BEHAVIORS OR PREDICTABLE RECURRENCES?

One common explanation for the terrorism-Islamist nexus is linear progression: nationalism and social revolution failed to fulfill Muslim aspirations, so groups turned to political Islam.<sup>54</sup> Not only do such accounts fail to take into account Islamic history – Islam has experienced purification campaigns and revitalization movements since the 700s – but developments in social movements have never been particularly neat or tidy. In fact, all three strands – religion, social revolution, and revolutionary nationalism – have long co-existed. Thanks to exiles, émigrés, and refugees, there has been extensive borrowing back and forth. We see this throughout the Reformation period, and certainly thereafter. For instance, the Jesuits inspired the Order of Illuminists who set themselves up in opposition to the more conservative Masons who themselves became a model and recruiting ground for early 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal revolutionaries in America, nationalist revolutionaries in France, etc.<sup>55</sup> Nor is there anything particularly new about 20<sup>th</sup> century conceptions of irregular warfare. Most of the principles being rediscovered today, as everyone scrambles to study lessons learned from Malaya, Vietnam, or even the era of the Arab Revolt, were already well-known in the early 1800s.<sup>56</sup>

There are two potential explanations for this, and for why we also see the same kinds of structures reemerge across cultures and through time: diffusion, clearly. But also efficacy. That the same organizational techniques and approaches work regardless of the local culture or the cause speaks to some other commonality. How about young men?

As one much quoted analyst has concluded about how terrorist networks recruit and retain members, “it’s all really group dynamics” – to which there is an even more obvious rejoinder: yes, and it always has been.<sup>57</sup> After hundreds of years worth of religious orders, cells, circles, revolutionary vanguards and so on, we should know what it is about small groups that will attract young males. We should also recognize what kinds of activities retain their attention.

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<sup>54</sup> Amin Maalouf makes this argument: Arabs and Muslims were not tempted to go down the religious path until all others were blocked... “Muslim movements today are not a product of history, but are a product of our time” (65) – wrong.

<sup>55</sup> See James Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith*, 3<sup>rd</sup> printing, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003 [1980]).

<sup>56</sup> Again, see Billington.

<sup>57</sup> Marc Sageman, “Understanding Terror Networks,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, November 1, 2004 (distributed by [fpri@fpri.org](mailto:fpri@fpri.org)), 5.

In his long history about Western revolutionaries, James Billington chastises historians for paying so little attention to ‘romantic occultism,’ especially when secret societies flourished throughout Europe from at least the early 1800s onward.

The plain fact is that by the mid-1810s there were not just one or two but scores of secret revolutionary organizations throughout Europe – extending even into Latin America and the Middle East. These groups, although largely unconnected, internationalized the modern revolutionary tradition and provided the original forum for the general debate in the modern world about the purposes of political power in a post-traditional society. And it was they who in the process of modernization pioneered a phenomenon by now familiar: impatient youth forming their own organizations to combat monarchical-religious authority.<sup>58</sup>

Youth did not need tutors or manuals, not when under-employed young Germans in the early 1800s viewed “revolt as a transcendent act of self-assertion” or Italian nationalist martyrs in the 1830s could inspire Poles to develop “a pathology of martyrdom.”<sup>59</sup> Violence came to be considered the ‘ultimate form of radical simplification’ until terrorism proved even better as “the ultimate method of revolutionary *simplification*, the antidote to both complexity and confusion, the ‘only one means.’”<sup>60</sup>

Revolutionaries also developed the expectation that they could spark a chain reaction of revolutions, which in a very real sense they did.<sup>61</sup> In describing the impact of the Marquis de Lafayette and his peers, who were among the earliest believers in liberal revolution, Adam Zamoyski notes:

The wars and revolutions they started or embraced were acts of faith. They were for the most part born of vague longing not specific grievance, and that was why they lingered in the memory as glorious acts however dismal their outcome: grievances can fail to be righted, but hope can never be defeated.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men*, 87.

<sup>59</sup> For the first phrase, see Adam Zamoyski, *Holy Madness: Romantics, Patriots, and Revolutionaries, 1776-1871* (New York: Viking, 1999), 163. For the second phrase, see Zamoyski, 291.

<sup>60</sup> Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men*, 409.

<sup>61</sup> A point repeatedly made by Billington.

<sup>62</sup> Zamoyski, *Holy Madness*, 450.

If all of this sounds familiar, it gets eerier still. Consider fascists who “gained a glimpse of glory by association, by feeling part of a supernation... supposedly endowed with superior virtues and spiritual qualities” and who engaged in “self-sacrifice for a higher cause, for an ideal world, cleansed of human greed and injustice.”<sup>63</sup> The fact that fascism itself borrowed techniques from established religions as well as socialist movements could almost bring us full circle.<sup>64</sup> But it does not quite get us to the present. For that we might consider southern Thailand. There Muslim separatists are busily expanding their organization using the same seven-step process that Thai communists pioneered several decades ago. Instead of focusing on politics and economics, they obviously focus on religion and, according to one recent report, are increasingly shifting their aims to bring them in concert with those of other Islamists: from liberating Pattani from Siam (Thailand) to liberating Muslims from the infidels.<sup>65</sup>

Equally easily, we can look back at the history of some of the great religious brotherhoods and find similar transnational, never mind, transregional networks and aims. Not only has Islam long generated religious groupings (and methods of schooling) that share many of the features of what comprise secret societies and ‘radical-utopian networks’ elsewhere, but:

Similarities between such groups and Muhammad’s original community can be observed at several levels (not coincidentally, for these groups have sought to legitimize their behavior with appeals to the example of the Prophet). One is the use of kinship, friendship and other personal ties and loyalties to bring new members into the movement. Another is the reliance on small, highly personal, and secretive cells...<sup>66</sup>

Thus, as far as underlying fundamentals are concerned, we could conclude: ‘*plus ça change...*’ except that there are some structural differences worth noting. For one, religion as a motivator can offer more than ideology, as we will see below. But also, Islam in particular, which does not exactly describe or define a distinct people, does offer a recipe for action (and behavior) to people who *are* Muslims.<sup>67</sup> The Quran and Hadith serve as templates; scripture, in this case, is

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<sup>63</sup> Ian Buruma & Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 72.

<sup>64</sup> See Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 87.

<sup>65</sup> Thammanoon Maisonti, *A Proposal to Address the Emerging Muslim Separatist Problem in Thailand* (MA thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2004), 35.

<sup>66</sup> Guilain Denoux, *Urban Unrest in the Middle East: A Comparative Study of Informal Networks in Egypt, Iran, and Lebanon* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), p. 209.

<sup>67</sup> In the past Christianity has, too. The First Crusade was “a cellular, organic entity... [whose] one advantage was that this somewhat haphazard host shared a powerful, unifying goal” (Asbridge 65). That, too, could describe AQ today.

script – especially since Muhammad was so successful. He formed the ultimate secret society and waged the ultimate triumphant battles. Combine early Islam’s resoundingly successful history *with* a cyclical view of history and hope ends up fused to purpose.<sup>68</sup> This makes it eminently attractive to youth. But Islam, in addition, does not just contain within itself a revolutionary or reformist impulse, it also formats *how* reform or revolution are to be accomplished. This is yet another reason this particular religion represents such a challenge.

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<sup>68</sup> Richard Fletcher makes the point that there is no adequate historical explanation for Islam’s swift and spectacular early spread in *The Cross and the Crescent: Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation* (New York: Viking, 2003), 15-16 – leaving devout Muslims reassured: it was a miracle engineered by Allah.

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## VI. BEYOND ISLAM: RELIGION VS. IDEOLOGY

Given that westernization is akin to an assault on people's identity – or amounts to an insult at the very least – we should expect more clashes ahead. This is one reason we need to be clear about what Islam is – a religion or an ideology? – not only because we increasingly conflate the two, but because conflicts over identity inspire a far uglier dynamic than conflicts involving reputation.<sup>69</sup> We do not yet know what strands of nativism other non-westerners will draw from – East Asians, for instance, do not have Islam or its exact equivalent. But understanding what religion vs. ideology offers may nonetheless help us avoid future conflation mistakes.

The most obvious distinction between religion and ideology involves divinity and the afterlife. Those who believe in God typically believe in Divine Judgment. If God is believed to have sanctioned a certain war and/or certain behaviors, there are no limits to what some men will then do. Whether religion engenders a greater will to win in individuals than identity is debatable, but for sheer numbers of people who it can inspire religion is hard to beat. That is because, as a coherent set of rituals, behaviors, and beliefs, religion offers a ready-made means of mobilization and organizable worshippers.<sup>70</sup> It also offers the ultimate grand strategy ('we are following God's plan') and rules that already feel familiar to adherents.

For most people – and here I refer to members of communal societies especially – religion is primordial. Individuals are born into religion and into family, which means that family and religion are intertwined from the outset (as we see with Islam). This makes it possible for personal faith to wax and wane over time – family members are not likely to question the depth of each other's feelings – which also helps explain how radicals can hide in plain sight (as we see with suicide bombers), and the inadvertence with which they can ask for benign-seeming favors.

For the religious, faith saturates daily life – through prayer, scripture, study, etc. Religious rites mark major life passages: birth, marriage, death, which help people deal with existential questions and anchor the community much the same way religious holidays frame the year. There is very little, actually, that religion does not address. But what is perhaps most important is that beyond meeting more needs than anything yet invented,<sup>71</sup> religion does not seem or feel invented.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> The Cold War was a war over reputations. World War II, interestingly enough, was mixed – with fiercer fighting when identity was involved (both the Germans and the Japanese were fighting to install racial hierarchies – and engaged in atrocities) vs. reputation (e.g. Italy). Dynastic wars in Europe were typically wars fought over reputation. Without question, wars of reputation can morph into wars of identity over time (witness the former Yugoslavia). And winning a war of identity (which is, arguably, what many nationalist struggles have been) can lead a country into being constrained by reputation.

<sup>70</sup> Note, the religion itself does not have to be organized to offer this.

<sup>71</sup> Fundamentalism goes even further: "Fundamentalism, whether Muslim or any other variety, is generally (though not invariably) characterized by a series of positions that are at the same time theological (Scripture is infallible)

What might trump religion? Nothing – or nothing that we are aware of thus far. There is no discernible mass movement or –ism apart from, perhaps, environmentalism, that can inspire so many segments of so many populations. But even if there were something being developed over the horizon with mass appeal and a unifying message, it is hard to imagine how it could supersede faith in an omnipotent, omniscient Power. This is where religion’s ultimate survivability comes from: its claim that whatever it cannot explain cannot be understood by us. That makes it undisprovable. Not so ideology.

... no matter how passionate one’s commitment to an ideology, the ideology remains, to some extent, *transparently arbitrary*. As such, it can be no more than a necessarily imperfect attempt to figure out what is right. This leaves open the possibility – indeed the eventual likelihood – that *another* ideology is truer.<sup>73</sup>

By definition ideology is secular and each ideology that comes along promises answers for all human problems.<sup>74</sup> No religion dares go that far. As a consequence, while numerous ideologies have proven perfectly capable of replacing religion in the minds and hearts of some, coercion has been required to instill respect for ideology in the minds of all. It cannot be a coincidence that totalitarian systems perfect surveillance, fear of surveillance, and compulsion.<sup>75</sup> Unlike religions, ideologies require inculcation individual by individual. Whatever solidarity they foster

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philosophical (Scripture is not subject to so-called critical analysis); historical (it envisions a return to origins); political (it advocates revolution in the name of religion); and... sociological (the movement is a ‘Church’ within the ‘Church’)” See, F.E. Peters, *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition*, vol. 1, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 196.

<sup>72</sup> There is actually a compelling, biological explanation for this: “Some concepts happen to connect with inference systems in the brain in a way that makes recall and communication very easy. Some concepts happen to trigger our emotional programs in particular ways. Some concepts happen to connect to our social mind. Some of them are represented in such a way that they soon become plausible and direct behavior. The ones that do *all* this are the religious ones we actually observe in human societies. They are most successful because they combine features relevant to a variety of mental systems” See Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 50.

<sup>73</sup> Scott Atran, *In Gods We Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 146.

<sup>74</sup> See Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men*, 266.

<sup>75</sup> One could argue this was also true of the Taliban and is true of the theocracy now running Iran – arguably because these are the methods required to run anything but a liberal state and theocracy does not countenance liberalism. On the other hand, it could also represent a failing of religious revolutionaries who, like all revolutionaries, focus their greatest efforts on attaining, not maintaining.

has to be consciously and continually created and recreated. Thus, ideological bonds cannot in any sense be considered primordial, not even by their fiercest advocates.<sup>76</sup>

Nor are ideologies particularly flexible, probably because they are not organic. They neither revolve around nor evolve from a core set of rituals, habits, or customs. The beauty of these at the heart of religion is that so long as some practices remain consistently the same, others can be permitted to change over time such that overall shifts feel natural and unforced.

Boil this down and what do we wind up with: we Americans would do better fighting against an ideology, but on behalf of religion. In many Americans' minds this is how we won the Cold War – we believed in God and the enemy did not. That cannot be said now of our current enemies, though for a host of reasons we continue to want to believe they are being motivated by ideology. Why? Because we are?

Although we believe that by sharing a democracy what we share *is* an ideology (or a civil religion), the context for our specific American democracy has always been Protestantism.<sup>77</sup> Arguably, we privilege the ideological components of our faith (little 'f') over the religious components because all forms of Protestantism are not the same and all Americans are not Protestants. The upside is that this predisposes us to treat all religions equally. The downside is that it also makes us susceptible to viewing everything in ideological terms. We make no bones about the fact that we would like to see our morals – gender equity, the protection of individual rights, etc. – adopted throughout the Middle East, for instance. And because we couch these values in terms of universal, not Christian (or Judaeo-Christian), values that is the light in which we believe others should view them, too. Never mind that they do not. This is of a piece with our Enlightenment conviction that ideas are liberating. The problem with this notion is that we then mistakenly assume that others oppose us for the ideas we disseminate, not recognizing that ideas on their own cannot contaminate; ideas need people as agents and practices as proof. These contaminate; these – meaning us – are what need to be wiped out.

Yet curiously, Usama bin Laden and his allies *have not* turned their jihad into a full-blown religious war. They have not declared war on Christianity. Could it be, as they suggest, that they are only fighting defensively? Or are they afraid that, by targeting Christianity, they will unite a Christian *umma*?

For its part, meanwhile, the Bush administration has gone out of its way to reaffirm that the War on Terrorism does not represent an attack on Islam. On its face, demurring like this suggests that both sides must recognize the gravity of the stakes were the war to be fully religicized. But if so, this implies a sort of reciprocity of legitimacy that neither side would agree exists. Forget the disparity in types of violence used and what this suggests about who is seen as asymmetrically

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<sup>76</sup> Even if academic skeptics are correct, and religion and nationalism are not primordial either, they can at least be assumed to be by members.

<sup>77</sup> As de Tocqueville pointed out and Samuel Huntington (*Who Are We?*) has recently reiterated.

immoral by whom. To 'them' we represent misguided liberal ideology usurping religion's role. To us 'they' represent an ideologically extreme version of an otherwise compatible faith (little 'f'). Neither side is quite right, of course: liberal ideology is no more separable from its strongly Protestant heritage than Islam is fully compatible with individuation or other western goals. But so long as this mutual mis-apprehension persists, we do have a window of opportunity. We could, potentially, alter the stakes and shift the conflict further from religion. To do so, though, first requires that we stop wooing moderates in order to isolate radicals. Attempting to separate the population along these lines flies in the face of how factionalization works, since our doing (or even openly desiring) *anything* becomes the means by which we guarantee that accommodationists will have nativists to contend with in perpetuity. Worse, by targeting 'radical' Islam, we simply push nativists to make more of religion than they have thus far.

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## VII. WHAT CAN WE DO?

How, then, do we shift the stakes? Do we, for instance, stop westernizing? Unfortunately, while this is the most logically obvious response, it is also the least possible – a bit too much akin to asking whether we can stop ourselves from being a contagion. *We* cannot. Even were we to give up our proselytizing mission as a crusader state, our brand of capitalism – the engine of our democracy – requires that we continually seek new markets, both for cheaper labor and so that we can keep selling our goods and services abroad.<sup>78</sup> We cannot remain ourselves and *not* export practices that we want others to adopt in order that they become individuals more like us – and more efficient, transparent, accountable, etc. in the process. This, in our view, is how we help people progress. And progress is one of our most cherished values.

Without doubt the westernization we are currently engaging in is considerably different than the imperial brands of westernization practiced in previous centuries, when Westerners inserted themselves at the top of local power structures. Today we increasingly seek to reform unfair power structures, not co-opt them. But it is less clear that we want, or should want, to threaten the salience of primordial identity. Yet, whenever we promote change we threaten the nature of local social relations and, to those for whom these are sacrosanct, this constitutes nothing less than an attack on their identity.<sup>79</sup>

If pushing change is not wise, what about encouraging toleration? Toleration clearly works for us. It is hard not to assume it should work for everyone. Indeed, trade seems impossible without it – unless our brand of toleration works for certain kinds of transactions only. History would seem to support such a notion. For instance, consider the switch in our attitudes toward, and interest in, Arabia. How might we explain that, once upon a time, there was mutual toleration, and maybe even affection, between Arabs and Anglo-Americans?<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps the best way to characterize the Arabophilia which thrived pre- and post-World War I is to cite the intrinsic appeal of Bedouin (and biblical) exoticism. But also, visitors to the Middle East typically found themselves rubbing shoulders with, and being accepted by, members of highly cultured local elites. The technological gulf was not unbridgeably wide ‘back then;’

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<sup>78</sup> ‘Crusader state’ is borrowed from Walter MacDougall’s title, *Promised Land, Crusader State*. On our need for markets, see Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>79</sup> Of course, we also do not see the contradictions in promoting something like gender equity or gender blindness on the one hand, and separation of ‘church’ and ‘state’ on the other, each of which flies in the face of most religions but, taken together, surely threatens the bounds of rational order as far as many people are concerned.

<sup>80</sup> Examples are T.E. Lawrence, Gertrude Bell, Freya Stark, Wilfred Thesiger, but also the Americans described in Robert Kaplan’s *The Arabists: The Romance of an American Elite* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), though a number of those he describes were motivated by a (Christian) missionary impulse. Also see John Ure, *An Anglo-American Obsession from Hester Stanhope to Bruce Chatwin* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2003).

technology was not essential so much as intriguing. Basically, what we see with hindsight is that relationships could be forged based on a genuine appreciation of differences, and individuals on both sides, we could say, were operating from what they would have regarded as positions of inherent strength.<sup>81</sup> Oil had not yet led to a resentment-filled inter-dependence.<sup>82</sup> Nor had oil wealth proven corrosive or corrupting. Also awareness of, or concern about, gender relations had not attained prominence, let alone begun to rankle.

What a difference decades – and oil, modernization and the end of empire – make if we compare this to the situation just prior to 9/11, when few if any tourists ventured to the Middle East to see anything other than ancient ruins. To this day, Westerners flock to India to sit at the feet of gurus, join ashrams and experience modern-day Indian ‘culture.’ Buddhism attracts lifelong adherents. New Agers have made a fetish of ‘Native American’ spiritualism. But aesthetic curiosity about Islam? That we manifest so little respect for, let alone interest in, Islam’s intrinsic worth simply reinforces what traditionalists suspect: we think we are superior. We are not transacting with Muslims *as* equals, or with respect, let alone showing them any admiration. That, then, becomes one motivation for Islamist youth (especially) to prove to us that we are wrong.

But there is another reason to mention aesthetics in relation to toleration. Rulers through the ages who sought to create great works by which to project aesthetic power, boost their prestige and enhance their reputation gathered together the most skilled artisans and craftsmen they could find, regardless of their communal affiliations.<sup>83</sup> Appreciation of others’ artistic talents has long been a stepping-stone to tolerance. But such toleration also could only be guaranteed by rulers who balanced factions and communities via benign rule. We represent a very different pathway to toleration. In the American case in particular, institutionalized checks guarantee us individual liberty.<sup>84</sup> We could say that while empires were comprised of groups out of which individuals (e.g. great painters, musicians, etc.) could emerge, we consist of individuals from among whom groups can form. The loci of control are considerably different. But so, too, is what is tolerated. For instance, for all the toleration we believe we manifest, and for all our lauding of multiculturalism and pluralism (something empires really did protect), there are at least two things we not only cannot, but will not tolerate. One is communal solidarities or attachments

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<sup>81</sup> As one student of Europe’s Religious Wars puts it, “toleration is a grudging concession granted by one body from a position of strength” (MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, 526) – a slightly different definition than that usually used, but intriguing nonetheless, especially since MacCulloch then draws a contrast with liberty: “liberty provides a situation in which all religious groups are competing on an equal basis” (526).

<sup>82</sup> In contrast, today we resent them for being able to hold our dependence on oil over our heads; they resent us for our technological know-how without which oil would not be extracted. Of course, Israel is another element of mutual resentment, but one that is not unrelated to these resented dependencies.

<sup>83</sup> Balance could be achieved via the careful local distribution of power and/or by retaining control over the means of destruction (and their production).

<sup>84</sup> E.g. England, Switzerland and the United States – a heritage of Protestantism, or federalism, or both.

taking precedence over the primacy of individuals. The second is domination by a denomination. Because we cannot reconcile ourselves to either of these, a fundamental incompatibility does exist. Ironically, liberty only exacerbates this, especially if Isaiah Berlin is correct and “individuals must have secure cultural belonging if they are to be genuinely free.”<sup>85</sup>

The salience of communal or corporate identity versus individualism has been spinning societies and cultures along different trajectories for hundreds if not thousands of years. Despite the optimism about modernization that led social scientists to predict the withering away of communal attachments decades ago, we are at the point now where it should be clear: the tighter the congruencies between all parts in the system the harder it is for the forces of individualism (and westernization) to prevail, particularly in a post-conquest age – where can they find purchase? History would *seem* to suggest: through materialism and consumerism, technical education and ultimately, then, via ideas.<sup>86</sup> But among whom, we might wonder, *have* ideas typically worked? This is the quintessential Enlightenment question. The short answer is: ideas work among individuals, among people willing to question their identity and religion, people who are already happy to regard themselves as independent entities. Ideas, in other words, can only really erode beliefs among those who do not want to draw their primary identity from the group and/or do not feel they owe the group their allegiance. People like this exist in every society. Thus, our ideas have always won some allies and they always will. The kicker, of course, comes with factionalization. The more individuals like these there are or the more they question, the more this causes others to retrench.

Because we have paid insufficient attention to the dynamics of factionalization, and because we see certain segments in all societies that have embraced changes we have sought, it is easy to presume that with just a bit more urging – with stickier messages and the right format, or greater investment and economic opportunity – we will push people over the tipping point. But, unfortunately, the realities are such that the combination of westernization, what it threatens and how societies factionalize will perpetually generate nativists. Worse, when nativists belong to one of the great world religions, religion offers them a global ‘community.’ It may not be a community that holds together, but so long as small constituent groups think it might, or believe it should, they will be willing to do horrific things.

Consider, meanwhile, what a religion – in theory – *should* also be able to do. Peoples who share the same religion may take on the features of a nation over time. We could say that this is what Muhammad forged across communities for the Arabs who, prior to his introduction of Islam, shared a language and modes of livelihood, but little else. Muhammad and the early caliphs then emphasized the *umma*, a concept that, if wielded correctly, could prove far more overarching than ‘the Arabs’ or any other collectivity yet known.

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<sup>85</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 188.

<sup>86</sup> Actually, nothing has been as useful for getting people to change as taxation – at least in Africa. This is the only thing colonial officials found short of physical force that they could use to induce people into the labor market and cash economy.

Perhaps. But how ironic if the status Muhammad bestowed upon the Arabs – simply by virtue of his having been one – proves to be the *umma*'s Achilles heel.

If we go back just 100 years, what kind of *umma* do we find? Not a very united one. Despite the Caliph's call to jihad during World War I, the *umma* never did coalesce. One problem was that the Ottomans were despised. From Senegal to Sudan, Muslims refused to support them. Not uncoincidentally, the Japanese did not pull off their Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere during World War II either. Like their allies, the Germans, the Japanese were too intent on their own superiority. So, it turns out, may be the Saudis and other Gulf State Arabs today. Not only does their oil wealth confirm their sense of their own self-worth, but the extent to which they lord their status over other Muslims does not set well with non-Arabs. Other Muslims do not particularly like them. *Here* is a potential wedge.

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## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

We cannot supersede religion. We cannot contain it either. But we also cannot directly confront it, counterintuitive as this may seem. As soon as we voice our preferences, or praise moderation and moderates, or preach toleration, we create problems for those who want to work with us. We would do far better instead to encourage fractures over anything *but* religion. One reason that class warfare worked so well for the communists was because it tapped into natural human resentments that *did not* directly threaten the integrity of what people considered to be most primordial about their identity. Even so, class warfare most surely undermined all sorts of communal identities and attachments over time. There is a lesson to be learned from this.

If we review the linkages this paper describes, here is what we might conclude: adolescence primes young males to experiment, seek intensity, join groups, be secretive, engage in base *and* noble deeds, attain transcendence and the list goes on. Rebellion is clearly part of this mix, but the mix itself is what is most important because it renders young males easy to rally to Causes. Causes matter more than they otherwise might thanks to factionalization. This is the process by which personal rivalries are writ into principles, principles are personalized, enemies wind up dehumanized and atrocities can occur. Of course, committing atrocities is something some young males do not seem to mind doing, not just because peers are involved, but because atrocities represent violence taken to the *nth* degree.

Then there is westernization. This is an issue around which factions in communal societies can position themselves. It also turns those wedded to the primacy of the group into nativists, since if you imperil the group's existence, you imperil their essence. Self-sacrifice on behalf of the group is not, then, *self*-sacrifice.

This, at any rate, would be one approach to hooking the enablers – adolescence, factionalization, and westernization – together, and I have not even touched on what Islam, in particular, brings to the table. There are myriad other ways to explain how the overlaps and congruencies work. However, that there *are* overlaps and congruencies is what is most important. This means that it is no one thing alone that accounts for our present predicament. Worse, if it is adolescence and not just unemployed young men, factionalization and not just former Baathists or Taliban, and westernization, not just insufficient development assistance, what are our options?

We cannot smash the links between young males and violence, or the allure of revolt and the need for Cause – these are by-products of adolescence. We cannot prevent factionalization – this is a staple of social life. We cannot, as the United States, stifle westernization *and* remain a capitalist power. In sum, we cannot do away with any of the enablers.

Can we shift them? Yes, but not via ideology and not by constructing some alternative reality. Not even the Wizard of Oz could pull this off, though his failure does offer a valuable insight and brings us back to young males. One reason adolescence is so unsettling is because this is exactly when adolescents begin to discover that adults do not have all the answers, or all the power, and are not necessarily any more capable than they are. Ergo adolescents grow increasingly hard to fool. But they also become easier to captivate *if* something proves

sufficiently grand *and* immediately gratifying, and if they can belong to small groups *and* to something larger, too. Far better for us if local identity – not religion – provides that glue.

There are at least three reasons why we should want to promote something like country-based identities as a counter to Islam's trans-national appeal.<sup>87</sup> Not only is this a tried and true tactic – crudely put, better Iran vs. Iraq than all nativist Muslims vs. us – but it makes use of extant divides. The world is already carved up into countries. This means the bases for chauvinism and resentments already exist (non-Arabs vs. Arabs, for instance). It may actually take less to stir up trouble between nationalities than to topple regimes (just consider sports rivalries and how these can agitate young males). Second, we already know how effective and long-lived a rallyer something like nationalism *can* be. Not only have nationalist struggles often lasted generations – thereby tying together generations – but nationalists on their home turf are virtually impossible to beat (certainly, democracies cannot beat them). This bespeaks a deep if not visceral commitment and attachment to an identity that *feels* primordial. Nor should this be surprising. After all, nationalism – like religion – builds on institutions found at the grassroots: family, local community, peer groups. In addition to subsuming these, nationalism builds on their strengths. Nothing else we can come up with is likely to leach away religion's organizational strengths in quite these ways. More to the point still, anything else we invent will be too much like an ideology.

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<sup>87</sup> Here I use nationalism to refer to bonds among people in a nation-state, not to ethnic communities that stretch across state boundaries.

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## IX. AN IMMODEST PROPOSAL: HOW TO TIE YOUTH AND NATIONALISM TOGETHER

If we were to consider our ongoing challenge to be how to split the *umma*, re-orient nativists and get adolescents involved in building all of us a better future, we would be short-sighted not to ask how *we* – and we Americans, in particular – can possibly do any of these things without further enraging, emboldening or increasing the numbers of our opponents?

At the same time, if what we seek is to prevent *transnational* terrorism, then it would seem that our corollary need is to prevent Pakistani Muslims from thinking of themselves as Muslims first and Pakistanis second. Rather, we need them to take more pride in being Pakistani (or South Asian or Baluchi or Pashtun) than in being like Saudis (Arabs) or Moroccans (North Africans), etc. In other words, Pakistani Muslims would have to feel – and not just think – that they not only share more with their fellow citizens than they do with Muslims elsewhere, but that they are somehow distinctively different *in addition* to being Muslim. Ditto for Indonesian Muslims, Thai Muslims, Kenyan Muslims, etc. This, it seems to me, brings us back to nationalism.

At the same time, to stop the flow of young males to Islamist and insurgent Causes means doing something *with* young males that offers them comparable fulfillment. Historically speaking, the only thing that seems to have worked thus far that could serve both purposes – and others, to boot – is National Service.

Many Americans dislike the idea of National Service; it smacks too much of the Nazis, and seems too easy for fascists to hijack. But as the means by which to help shift allegiances from a universalizing religion, it may be the lesser of all evils. At the very least, it seems worthwhile to consider what it *could* do.

For instance, nothing builds a stronger sense of nationalism faster, short of war. Nothing builds stronger states. And so long as it is mandatory universal service, nothing else would be nearly so effective at getting young men off the streets and under adult control. Indeed, none of the things National Service could do could be done as systematically or effectively by anything else.

Preventing young males from being able to engage in random or organized acts of violence would immediately enhance domestic security. Engaging them in civic action – putting them to work on public works projects, for instance – would go far to tying their country together, physically and socially. Not only does sweat equity serve as a direct investment in something outside of oneself – in the same ways that more staid public service contributes to the sense that one belongs to a broader society – but ‘forcing’ people to mix in the process leads to bonds that crosscut communal ties. When done correctly, especially when individuals can see themselves contributing to a *tangible* better good together, a heightened sense of nationalism or, at the very least, national pride results. So does a stronger state with a more robust infrastructure and a more capable work force.

Despite all the recent attention accorded the 'Greatest Generation' we tend to forget that what World War II era conscription did was force individuals who never would have had to interact with each other to interact as co-dependents. Perhaps Hollywood has romanticized just how diverse the stereotypical platoon really was: with a Pole, an Italian, a Yankee, a Southerner serving side by side as brothers in arms. But the great public works projects during the Depression (e.g. the CCC) did much the same thing. Israel offers an even more dramatic example. Israeli nationalism is less the consequence of 50 years of war than it is the result of a concerted government effort to forge a sense of nationalism via compulsory service. From the outset, the Israeli government quite deliberately used national service to 'nationalize' new immigrants.

How could we possibly introduce something like this abroad? We would not – without first adopting universal mandatory national service here at home, and our adoption of it would lead others to do the same. This way our main strategic intent – to shift people's primary allegiance away from religion – would never have to be mentioned. There are, after all, plenty of reasons why we could use National Service ourselves.

First, introducing National Service would silence talk about the need for a draft. Even if military service were one of only a range of national service options, requiring all young people to serve in some capacity would generate plenty of volunteers for the armed forces (males especially). Rhetorically, National Service fits with President Bush's aims of creating an 'ownership' society since it would foster notions of personal responsibility. National Service would engage all young people in the War on Terrorism and in Homeland Security broadly construed (which is how Homeland Security *should* be construed). As we know from grassroots efforts in environmental outreach, as young people become engaged, so do their parents, teachers, etc. National Service would likewise be the ideal forum for improving Civil Defense preparedness nationwide.

But beyond what National Service could do for us domestically, once we go down this road we become an exemplar. Even better, we can actively promote National Service abroad without seeming to have any ulterior motives: when we say this is in Afghanistan's best interests, for example, who can possibly refute us and on what grounds?

As for the likeliest potential objection, even were National Service and state-sponsored nationalism to lead to what it often led to in the past – namely, war – inter-state conflict is eminently containable today.<sup>88</sup> We have two vivid proofs of this. The recent wars in the former Yugoslavia did not ignite World War III. And the war that many dubbed a 'world war' in Africa – the conflagration in the Congo – involved nine African countries, but no others.

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<sup>88</sup> The financial costs should be immaterial. It is this or the incalculable costs associated with an endless anti-westernization struggle.