

Chapter 12

Talking with the Muslim World

12.1 One Challenge, Wrapped in a Bigger One

The struggle against terrorism in the Middle East has led to a quest to find ways to counter the normative appeal¹ of violent extremists, especially the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). There is widespread recognition that ISIS has a very effective normative position as indicated by the fact that it (a) strongly motivates its rank and file; (b) has persuaded many thousands of young Muslims from around the world to join its ranks; and (c) has considerable appeal in parts of the Muslim world. Several analyses of ISIS' normative appeal focus on its ability to exploit social media; however, much of ISIS' appeal derives not just from the tools and platforms it leverages but from the underlying message that it broadcasts. Boaz Ganor, the executive director of the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism writes: "[ISIS] captivates these young people, not only by virally disseminating its messages of victory and barbarism, but also, and perhaps mainly, by inviting them to join an alternative conceptual system" (Ganor 2015). Psychologist John Horgan finds that ISIS recruits typically feel a "a very, very strong moral pull...this passionate need to right some perceived wrong, to address some sort of injustice, to restore honor to those from whom it's been taken" (Singal 2014). Although the vast majority of the Muslim world opposes ISIS, there are significant minorities in several very disparate countries that seem to support ISIS. A Pew Global Attitudes Survey in Spring 2015 found that 20% of Nigerian Muslims and 12% of Malaysian Muslims had "favorable" opinions of ISIS while the percentages for Pakistan and Senegal

This chapter draws on: "Talking to the Muslim World: How, and with Whom?" in *International Affairs* 92 (6), (2016): 1361–1379. I am indebted to David Kroeker-Maus for extensive research assistance on this paper. Amelia Arsenault, Shahira Fahmy and Nick Cull provided thoughtful comments and insights on a previous draft of this chapter.

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

were 9% and 11% respectively (Poushter 2015). Although a small minority, these percentages represent millions of Muslims around the world who support ISIS at least to some extent.

The US lacks a compelling normative response to ISIS' appeal in the Muslim world. Charlie Winter (2015) writes "This war [against ISIS] cannot be won through military and political means alone; it is as much a war of information and propaganda as anything else and, currently, it is fatally imbalanced to the advantage of Islamic State." Christina Schori Liang, a senior fellow at the Geneva Center for Security Policy, put it more simply: "We need a compelling story that makes our story better than theirs, and so far their story is trumping ours" (Geller 2016).

The challenge posed by ISIS' normative positions is part of a much greater challenge concerning how the West should speak to and with the Muslim world, a world in which, it is generally agreed, the US has not found an effective way to "win hearts and minds."² The Chicago Council on Global Affairs noted in a 2010 report that ongoing theological debates within several religions, including Islam, will have profound foreign policy consequences, but warned that "the United States often lacks the capacity to understand even the broad contours of such debates, much less the subtleties and nuances of religious history, theological argument, and cultural context" (Appleby et al. 2010).

Amr and Singer (2007) of the Brookings Institute pointed out:

By any measure, America's efforts at communicating with Muslim-majority nations since 9/11 have not been successful. The efforts have lacked energy, focus, and an overarching, integrated strategy. Instead, the efforts have relied on informational programming that has lacked priority or been misdirected, lacked nuance in dealing with diverse and sensitive issues, and not reached out to the key "swing" audiences necessary to marginalize and root out violent extremists.³

Freud argued that there are no accidents; when people act in ways that seem ineffectual or illogical, there are often underlying causes that drive such behavior. I suggest the same holds for governments and nations. The reason the US is doing so poorly in countering the message of ISIS and in communicating with the Muslim world is not because the people at the State Department are witless or undedicated. There are deep underlying issues that explain why they are bound to fail.

Once these are better understood—the subject of the next section—we might be better positioned to suggest what might be done and by whom.

²The often repeated phrase entered into popular use following the release in 2003 of the Report of the State Department's Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, often called the Djerejian Report. See Djerejian 2003.

³Steven Kull notes that US Diplomats are particularly ill-equipped to understand this conflict, as they are pre-disposed to view conflicts as primarily between organized groups. See Kull 2014.

12.2 Components of US Normative Strategy

The US' normative position toward the Islamic world draws on three basic elements:

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

The three positions differ in the ways they are promoted within the Muslim world: Liberal democracy is most explicitly promoted by the US government through a variety of agencies, including the State Department, the National Endowment for Democracy, publicly-funded broadcasters like Voice of America and Radio Sawa, and various NGOs—and in several key cases by the US military and the CIA, including in effecting regime changes. Secularism is promoted much more implicitly, we shall see, but by the same agencies and NGOs. Capitalism is promoted by various agencies and divisions within the State Department and Department of Commerce, by private lobbies such as the US Chamber of Commerce, and by the World Bank and IMF (in which the US plays a leadership role).⁴ Above all, the view of what Americans consider the good life, and believe others could gain if they work hard, is promoted very effectively through American movies and TV programs and by tourists. According to Northwestern University in Qatar's 2016 "Media in the Middle East" study, at least half of respondents in Lebanon, Qatar, and the UAE said they watch American movies, and in Egypt, there were more respondents who said they watch American movies than those who watch movies from Arab countries (Northwestern University in Qatar 2016). One may say that Americans "ooze" the conception of affluent life as a good life in a way that supplements, and in many ways eclipses, the US government's explicit messaging.

12.2.1 *The Precariousness of Secularism*

David Hume wrote in *The Natural History of Religion* in 1757 that "the primary religion of mankind arises chiefly from an anxious fear of future events; and what ideas will naturally be entertained of invisible, unknown powers, while men lie

⁴Rajiv Chandresakaran gives a particularly striking view of the US' attempts to promote capitalism immediately after the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. See Chandresakaran 2007, 2012.

under dismal apprehensions of any kind, may easily be conceived” (Hume 1757). This Enlightenment view of religion as a vestige of an earlier, more primitive age, akin to witchcraft, alchemy, and sorcery—influenced the founders of the United States, as did their experience with the powerful, established Anglican Church in Great Britain. These factors, as well as the quest for tolerance from groups that practiced different versions of Christianity, led the founders to enshrine the separation of church and state into the US Constitution.

The anthropological view of religion in turn held that humans would ultimately evolve out of religion. Anthropologist Anthony Wallace wrote in 1966 that “belief in supernatural beings and in supernatural forces that affect nature without obeying nature’s laws will erode and become only an interesting historical memory” (Wallace 1966). And although Americans privately were and are more religious than the citizens of most (if not all) other developed nations, only a minority support establishing an official state religion.⁵

The same core idea guides US foreign policy. Sheherazade (2007) writes:

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

Conversely, Shadi Hamid (2016) writes in his book *Islamic Exceptionalism*:

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

Thus, in its dealings with Muslim-majority countries, the US keeps looking for allies that are secular and seeks to ensure that they too will separate state and religion. John Kerry stated in 2015, “We all agree that it’s imperative to save the state of Syria and the institutions on which it is built and preserve a united and **secular** Syria [emphasis added]” (Kerry 2015). When Hosni Mubarak was swept from office by the 2011 Tahrir Square protests, Rep. Howard Berman, then the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, stated, “As this change takes hold, we must keep firmly in mind that our goals include an Egypt that supports close relations with the United States; supports the welfare of the Egyptian people, including democracy and universal human rights; [and] is **secular** in orientation [emphasis added]” (Berman 2011). In Iraq, USAID contractors tasked with reforming the education system sought to remove religious references from textbooks (Etzioni 2007).

⁵In recent years, various polls have consistently found the percentage of respondents who support making Christianity the official religion to be in the low 30s. See for example, http://big.assets.huffingtonpost.com/toplines_churchstate_0403042013.pdf and <http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/pdf/2015/ReligionPollingResults.pdf>

The strong preference for secular forces and the quest to enshrine separation of state and religion in the Muslim world ignores the fact that, far from fading, religion is actually growing and playing a much greater role in many regions of the world—especially among Muslims. Polls show that the majority of Muslims want religion to play a *greater* role in public life, and want a state that is *more* influenced by Islam, not less. After decades in which communist governments used the educational system, cultural products, and the media to suppress religion—communism has faded but churches are full in Russia; in 2014, 72% of Russians identified as Orthodox Christian, up from 31% when the Soviet Union disbanded in 1991 (Pew Research Center 2014). In China, the number of Protestants alone has grown by 10% per year since 1979, and China may well soon have a larger Christian population than any other country in the world (Albert 2015). Hinduism has always had, and continues to have a key role in India, a fact highlighted by the election of the current Hindu nationalist government; meanwhile, the number of Muslims and Christians in India is also growing. In Latin America and Africa, the Catholic and Anglican churches have long held sway over politics, but are currently being challenged by the rise, not of secularism, but of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Polling indicates that a majority of Muslims in many countries would like to see Islam and, specifically, Islamic law, play a **greater** role in their lives. A Pew Research Center survey asked Muslims in 2015 whether they want Islamic law (or Sharia) to be the official law of the land in their country. Nearly all Muslims in Afghanistan (99%) and most in Iraq (91%) and Pakistan (84%) support Sharia as official law. In the largest Muslim-majority countries in the world, there is significant support for making Sharia official: In Indonesia, 72% were in favor; in Bangladesh, 84%; in Nigeria, 71% and in Egypt, 74% (Lipka 2015). Polling data from the Arab Barometer Surveys found that, across seven different Arab countries, 34% of respondents said they preferred Sharia without democracy, and 41% said they supported both. Only a small minority (14%) said they supported democracy without Sharia (Ciftci 2012).⁶ The role of Islam is growing significantly in countries where it was once thought to be weakening, such as in Turkey and Tunisia (see Hirschl 2011). The rise of political Islam should not be too surprising, as “secularism” is an extremely fraught concept in the Islamic world; in many countries, secularism is synonymous with repression, from “Kemalist” Turkey to Bourguiba’s Tunisia (Al-Ghannouchi 2000).

Given the resurgence of religion as a political force globally and the particular antipathy toward secularism in much of the Muslim world, the US government is swimming against very powerful historical currents when it seeks to find and ally

⁶The Arab Youth Survey conducted by ASDA’s A Burson-Marsteller asked 3500 young Arabs in 16 different countries whether they agreed with the statement “Religion plays too big a role in the Middle East,” and found that majorities or pluralities said “yes.” However, the text of the question is much more ambiguous than the one asked by Pew (asking about the “Middle East” rather than the respondents’ particular countries and leaving “role” open to interpretation by the respondent rather than asking specifically about implementation of Sharia law). Moreover, the Arab Youth Survey asked the question about the role of religion in the context of Sunni-Shia conflict in the region. See <http://www.arabyouthsurvey.com/>

itself with secular groups in the Muslim world and to promote separation of mosque and state.⁷

12.2.2 *Promoting the Good Life*

Arguing that the prevailing American normative message to the Muslim world entails extolling consumerism as a means to attaining the good life may seem unsupported and overly critical. However, the US government has advocated and pressured other countries to open up markets to foreign investment, privatize state-owned corporations, deregulate their industries, and otherwise embrace neoliberal capitalism. These moves are justified on the grounds that they would lead to higher economic growth, which will enable the nations involved to provide their people with more goods and services, with a growing measure of the kind of affluence that Americans enjoy.

The US “oozes” this message via the ways that American life is displayed in the movies and television programs that are viewed by significant portions of the Muslim world. American pop culture remains popular even where American foreign policy is decidedly not: A Pew poll in 2013 found that only 7% of Shia Muslims in Lebanon had a favorable overall view of the US, but nevertheless, half had a favorable opinion of American pop culture (Wike 2013). Muslims also learn about the American consumerist lifestyle from observing tourists and business travelers who frequent their countries. In addition, the US government contracts PR and communications firms to portray the allure of capitalist affluence abroad.⁸

The promotion of the American conception of the good life—and what constitutes a “higher standard of living”—is explicitly favored by the US government as way to counter the appeal of radical extremist Islam, and to ‘drain the swamp’ in which terrorism festers. For example, in 2014, Secretary of State John Kerry stated, “We have a huge common interest in dealing with this issue of poverty, which in many cases is the root cause of terrorism” (Kerry 2014).

Others, including former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, have called for a “Marshall Plan for the Middle East,” to develop the region economically and politically (Clinton 2011). True, these drives are favored not merely as way to prevent terrorism but also to alleviate human suffering. However, the good intentions do not make them more realistic.

⁷A discussion of the lack of causal links between religiosity and violence is well beyond the scope of this paper. Jocelyne Cesari has examined the supposed exceptionalism of religiously-motivated violence, and demonstrated that the most extreme cases of religious violence since the inception of the nation-state have been instantiated by the politicization of religion initiated by “secular” state actors. See Cesari 2015.

⁸For example, in Kazakhstan, USAID hired Burson-Marsteller, the world’s PR firm, to develop a soap opera to sell capitalism and privatization to the people, as told in (Chua 2004).

This element of American normative messaging fails on several grounds. First, the data consistently fail to show a link between material deprivation and terrorism. For example, political scientist James Piazza's study of terrorist incidents in 96 different countries between 1986 and 2002 found no statistically significant correlation between any measures of economic development and terrorism (Piazza 2006). Peter Bergen and Swati Pandey's research undermines the putative link between inaccessibility to higher education and terrorism, as their study of 79 terrorists found that 54% had a university degree or at least some college education (compared to 52% of Americans with the same level of education). Bergen and Pandey (2006) conclude that "History has taught that terrorism has been a largely bourgeois endeavor."

Last but not least, many devout Muslims believe that Americans worship at the altar of consumer goods rather than that of God. They view their own conception of the good life—living by the dictates of the Qur'an (and Hadith)—as morally superior to a life of Western "hedonist materialism."

12.2.3 *Promoting Liberal Democracy*

Attempts to promote democracy and human rights around the world have a long history as a major element of American diplomacy, going back at least as far as Woodrow Wilson. Wilson envisioned the League of Nations as the centerpiece of a global order that would be based on democratic principles as well as promoting liberal regimes in the nations of the world. More recently, neoconservatives championed exporting democracy to foreign lands. After the collapse of the USSR, whose former members were assumed to be rushing toward forming liberal democracies, the neoconservatives assumed that authoritarian rulers were the last barriers preventing a world of flourishing democracy. Francis Fukuyama asserted in *The End of History* that Western liberal democracy was the final stage of evolution toward which all political regimes were converging.

If authoritarian regimes did not crumble under their own weight, neocons held that the US was called upon to use its might to topple such regimes, allowing their freed peoples to establish democracies in their wake.⁹

US experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq have demonstrated that democratic institutions cannot function without certain necessary underlying sociological conditions. Moreover, as Hamid (2016) notes, liberalism and democracy coincided for much of Western history, and thus have been conflated; however, they are in fact two very different concepts, and even in the West, liberalism had to precede democracy. These conditions are absent in large parts of the Muslim (and especially Arab) world. Oftentimes, the advocates for democratic regime change in the Middle East point to the example of post-World War II Germany and Japan as evidence that

⁹Robert Kagan and William Kristol wrote that the possibility of the US using its power to usher in democratic regime change from Iraq to China was "eminently realistic. See Kagan and Kristol 2000, 20.

democratic institutions can be successfully imported by outsiders. Even a cursory review of what happened in these two nations illustrates a lack of parallels to the present case. Both Japan and Germany had a strong national identity and sense of national unity—in contrast, many Middle Eastern countries whose borders were arbitrarily drawn by colonial powers are riven by internal strife and sectarian loyalties. In both Germany and Japan, the foreign occupation was widely viewed as legitimate; and both had solid economic fundamentals, such as a highly educated workforce and established infrastructure. Above all, democracy building started only after all opposing forces were defeated and all hostilities ceased.

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

12.3 Working with Islam to Address Islam

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

To form a sounder approach, one must acknowledge an observation that has been often overlooked or obscured: that there are two fundamentally different interpretations of Islam, *both* of which are supported by a close reading of the Qur’an and major texts.¹⁰

On one hand, Islam has characterized as a peaceful religion that has been distorted by malicious radicals. On September 17, 2001, less than a week after the World Trade Center collapsed, President George W. Bush declared “The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That’s not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace.” That same year, Bush also said, “The Islam that we know is a faith devoted to the worship of one God, as revealed through The Holy Qur’an. It teaches the value and the importance of charity, mercy, and peace” (Backgrounder: The President’s Quotes on Islam 2016). President Barack Obama stated that “We are at war with people who have perverted Islam” (Voice of America 2015). Others hold that terrorists and other violent extremists are not truly Muslims, such as the “You

¹⁰ See (Etzioni 2007) specifically Part III, “The True Fault Line: Warriors vs. Preachers”

ain't no Muslim, bruv" social media campaign in Great Britain that Prime Minister David Cameron praised (Gayle 2015).

In contrast, others in the West view Islam as an inherently violent religion. This view has proven particularly popular among Republican presidential candidates. Mike Huckabee, a former governor of Arkansas and two-time Republican presidential candidate, said, "The Muslims will go to the mosque, and they will have their day of prayer, and they come out of there like uncorked animals—throwing rocks and burning cars" (Wing 2013).

Our extensive study shows that *both* views ignore that the Qur'an and Hadith—like Christian and Jewish texts—contain passages that justify violence and others that reject it (Etzioni 2007). Both are part of Islam. The Qur'an does include an exhortation to "Slay the idolaters wherever you find them," (Q 9:5) and says, "I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Therefore strike off their heads and strike off every fingertip of them" (Q 8:12). In the Hadith, one reads "I have been commanded to fight against people so long as they do not declare that there is no god but Allah" (Sahih Muslim 1.9.30) and, "Killing Unbelievers is a small matter to us" (Tabari 9:69). One may call them warriors¹¹; "jihadists" seems closer to the common parlance.

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

A very telling example of the two iterations of Islam is the two views of "jihad," a term which literally means "struggle." It is interpreted by those who view Islam as

¹¹ Khaled Abou El Fadl identifies the schism within Islam as being between "moderates" and "puritans." This schema overlaps significantly with ours, but although El Fadl primarily identifies "puritans" as Wahabbists and Salafists, his criteria for delineation are the scope of application of religious texts that a particular version of Islam advocates, and the role of scholarly interpretation. See Abou El Fadl 2005.

legitimizing violence as a holy war to convert or kill all infidels. In sharp contrast, for moderate Islam, “jihad” is a spiritual struggle of seeking self-improvement. In *A Metahistory of the Clash of Civilisation*, Arshin Adib-Moghaddam dismantles rather systematically what he calls the “clash regime,” which perpetuates binary oppositions such as barbarian-civilized, Islam-Christianity, and West-Islam.¹² Significantly, Adib-Moghaddam (2010) notes that the advent of literalist Islam did not occur until after the siege of Baghdad by the Mongols in the thirteenth century; political Islam in this regard was borne in the context of existential crisis and external pressure.

This distinction between jihadist and moderate interpretations of Islam suggests that the most effective way to counter ISIS or other groups that draw inspiration from violent interpretations of Islam is not with secularism, the American version of the good life, or even liberal democracy, but rather with appeals based on moderate Islam. Simply put, Thomas Jefferson or John Locke will find little purchase among Muslims susceptible to the teachings of violent Islam; however, a dialogue could take as its point of departure the exhortations of clerics like Ali Sistani, the spiritual leader of Iraq’s Shi’a Muslims; Egypt’s Grand Mufti Shawqi Allam; the Arab League; the International Union of Muslim Scholars; and Mehmet Görmez, Turkey’s highest-level cleric (Center for Research on Globalization 2014).

Speaking to Muslims about universal women’s rights will be less persuasive than pointing out that the Prophet Muhammad’s views on gender were rather egalitarian for his time, and that his wives were influential in political and military matters (Mernissi 1992). As the title of this paper suggests, the US must learn to communicate with the Muslim world using Islamic terms and ideas, rather than rely on liberal, Western ones. (This echoes a broader critique leveled by Hamid Dabashi 2015 in *Can Non-Europeans Think*, which explores the way that the “ethnographic gaze” marginalizes philosophies and “thinkers” operating outside the “European philosophical pedigree.”)

One may respond that Jihadists are unlikely to be persuaded by appeals based on the nonviolent, moderate interpretations of Muslim texts. This may well be true. At the same time, those who already denounce violence hardly need such an appeal. The focus of efforts to dialogue with Muslims should be those in the middle, who are not yet committed to either side—what might be called the swing vote, a very large group (we shall see). If they were to join the ranks of those who are already committed moderates, jihadists would become an isolated minority and find it much more difficult to increase their ranks and replace those they lose to civil war and terrorism.

A full discussion on the nature of moral dialogues is beyond the scope of this chapter,¹³ but several characteristics are important to highlight for our purposes

¹²Tariq Ramadan has also explored the historical context in which a polarized understanding of the world arose in Islam. See Ramadan 2004.

¹³For more extensive discussion, see Etzioni 1997, 1998, 2006. Additionally, Thomas Risse has explored arguing and truth-seeking as communicative action in International Relations, and suggests that the preconditions for “argumentative rationality” are more common in International Relations than is usually assumed. See Risse 2000, 2004.

here. First, moral dialogues differ both from deliberations—which attempt to isolate “reason” from “passion”—and from culture wars, which turn differences into total opposition. Secondly, moral dialogues are necessarily normative, and are not mere discussions of fact or logic; they often appeal to some overarching value shared by all participants.

The swing vote needs to be addressed using the language of non-violent interpretations of Islam, rather than in terms of appeals based on liberal democracy because many who support moderation do not necessarily support human rights, especially in cases where it conflicts with Sharia. They are, thus, properly referred to as “illiberal moderates.” Evidence indicates that this group comprises the majority of Muslims worldwide. Pew polling found that in 2015, majorities in most Muslim countries thought suicide bombing was rarely/never justified: In both Iraq and Indonesia, over 90% responded thusly, and at least 80% said the same in Tunisia, Jordan and Pakistan. Even in Afghanistan, 58% of respondents said suicide bombing was rarely or never justified (Lipka 2015). As we have noted above, these same countries also had significant majorities that supported making Sharia official; it follows that the vast majority of moderates (in the sense of opposing violence) are also illiberal. For example, the Pew Research Center (2013) found that, across all Muslim countries, fewer than 10% of Muslims think that homosexuality is morally acceptable, including only 1% of respondents in such relatively liberal Muslim countries as Senegal and Indonesia. Similarly, in many Muslim countries, such as Pakistan, Iraq, Malaysia, and a handful of sub-Saharan African countries, a higher percentage of respondents thought polygamy was morally acceptable than thought divorce was morally acceptable (Pew Research Center 2013). Dedicated proponents of secularism fail to recognize granularity on the spectrum of religious involvement in politics. There are numerous groups who want Islam to play a greater role in public life, but do not favor coercive enforcement of religion. One would hardly fear a Caliphate headed by moderate Quakers or Reformed Jews; neither should one be troubled by an Islamic state if it follows one of the most oft-quoted lines from the Koran: “There should be no compulsion in religion” (Q 2:256).

This strategic position is similar to the one the US adopted during the Cold War. John Esposito (2007) observes that countering communism was premised on the thesis that the most effective way to counter violent socialism—communism—was to draw on the values of moderate socialism, on social democrat values rather than on those of groups at the opposite end of the normative spectrum, i.e. the conservatives.

12.4 In Conclusion

ISIS has crafted a compelling narrative that has lured Muslim recruits from all over the world. ISIS may be defeated militarily, but so long as the normative positions that it espouses remain relevant, other groups are likely to draw on them to support attacks on free societies, their allies, and moderate Muslims. Thus far, US

“counter-messaging” has been ineffective; it has failed to articulate a normative position that is responsive to the deeply-held beliefs of the majority of the world’s Muslims. The US strongly holds that religion should be a private affair; it continually seeks to ally itself with secular forces in the Muslim world and to promote them. These often turn out to be the weakest groups because the overwhelming majority of Muslims, data show, seek more religion in public life, not less. The US is promoting capitalism and hence in effect the affluent way of life associated with it. To many devout Muslims, it seems that Americans worship consumer goods instead of God, and others are further alienated to the point that they cannot find a job or are poorly paid and thus cannot gain even a piece of the life portrayed on American TV and in movies. Promising them economic development or a “Marshall Fund for the Middle East,” which cannot be delivered, just adds to their frustration. Promoting liberal democracy ignores the evidence that many of the nations involved have not yet developed the sociological foundations necessary for such a regime to take hold. The US—whether dealing with ISIS or other such groups or in addressing the much larger Muslim world—needs to appeal to different values than secularism, capitalism and democracy. The answer may be found in the fact that there are basically two different iterations of Islam. One legitimates violence, for instance in the call to kill all infidels. The other abhors violence and holds, for instance, that there ought to be no compulsion in religion. A very large part of the Muslim world, data show, subscribes to the moderate iterations of Islam. However, many of these do not accept secularism or liberalism. Hence, they are best called “illiberal moderates.” One can appeal to them in terms of rejecting terrorism and violence but much less so if one seeks to convince them to embrace other values that Americans hold dear.

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

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