

Two Enemies:

Non-state actors and change in the Muslim World

Abstract: *Forty months of war and no reason why. Americans still have no clear collective sense of what this war is about, who we are fighting, or what winning means. Many explanations have been offered—many by our own government—that are confusing, contradictory, and almost wholly wrong.*

There is of course nothing to stop us from fighting the war we wish to fight forever against an enemy that fits our needs, chanting that victory is inevitable someday, somehow. But this position is dangerous: If the invented reality we fight becomes separated from actual reality, then we risk being blinded to the course of actual reality.

No society wants to be at the mercy of developments that it cannot permit itself to see. After all, that is where we found ourselves on September 11, 2001, and that is where we are heading again.

Hence this argument offers, at one level, explanation:

- *This war is about “change” in the world of Islam. With change comes conflict, and conflict is thus the creative agency of change. For Muslims change means “deliverance” and “restoration”—and it has been repressed for decades.*
- *The United States—the “Other” in the eyes of Muslims—is paradoxically the bringer of change. We have created the space for change, we have created those we are fighting, and we have also made change in the Muslim World inevitable.*
- *But it will not be the change we want, and it will not happen the way we want it to happen. The U.S. invasion of Iraq has fundamentally altered the change dynamic in the Muslim World. It is the decisive element of this war. In its wake the old Arab establishment underwritten by America is collapsing. In its place will be something new. This is our doing, and we need to take its measure.*

Thus actual reality: past, present, and future. It is within actual reality that U.S. war reality unfolds, as Americans fulminate against Terrorism, Islamofascism, and other various incarnations of Evil.

The explanation offered here suggests that armed struggle has become the predominant, legitimate venue for change across the Muslim World. Moreover, change is not something squishy and amorphous. Change means new political formation—new future Muslim governance—and the chaos-space created by the U.S. invasion of Iraq has made this possible.

Furthermore, the United States has also created its enemies. They come in two forms. One, “Wilderness Ghazi,” we created in the U.S.-orchestrated Afghan Jihad against the Soviet Union. The other, “Civil Militia,” we created in Iraq. Both have evolved to become the makers of a new and emerging Muslim World. But we are not merely their creator: we have actually nurtured them through the act of fighting them, primarily in Iraq. We have ratified them, elevated them, and given them the mythic narrative of becoming through which they speak so strongly to their Ummah.

So finally, we are achieving the opposite of what we intended in Iraq. Iraq becomes significant not for itself alone, but for how it encourages change in the rest of the Muslim World, and also how it brings passionate urgency to defending the Ummah against the invader.

Our decisive act has not only changed forever the world of Islam, it has truly narrowed the range of our choices and the scope of our strategy. Short of an apocalyptic struggle with Islam, America’s best opportunity is to come to terms with change we can live with while fighting only those with whom we cannot. But will we? Can we?

This paper is a meditation on change, change we can see surging before us and change yet in prospect only: The collapse of the Arab ancien régime, the rise of new Muslim political models, the coming of successor states, and the failure of the United States to convert Islamic civilization to a U.S. simulacrum. All of this taken together suggests something of a transformation. But it would not be the transformation of technology and enterprise American-style. Rather, this is human change, the kind that will fill History’s stories for centuries to come.

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Preface

This paper represents a hypothesis and its ramifications: that the United States is the bringer of change to the Muslim World, change that can neither be controlled nor called back. My earlier papers—*Terror's Mask: Insurgency Within Islam* and *Culture's Mask: War and Change After Iraq*—suggested strongly that what we call “terrorism” is an expression of a broader conflict within the Muslim World. This conflict, moreover, was not prefigured simply by political failure, primarily in the Arab World. Rather, political failure and conflict are part of larger historical change. Conflict is also a creative part of change, helping to make new institutions and new concepts of society. Ironically it is the United States that opens up space for change and accelerates its progress in the world of Islam, *but not as we had hoped or planned*. U.S. actions have effectively opposed U.S. goals. We sought to use controlled conflict to create American-style change, but we have achieved the opposite. Conflict is now out of our control and works daily to create new Muslim-style politics.

Thus conflict itself has become historical change. But who will realize change? This paper argues that the Muslim World is being moved by the collective energies of its new fighter groups, and that these fighter groups are also the heart of new politics. Hence Muslim fighter groups—whether we call them terrorists or insurgents or more clinically, “non-state actors”—today define the essential relationship between conflict and new political formation in their world.

What follows is not ethnography, sociology, or political analysis of the many fighter groups emerging across the world of Islam. Instead this paper looks at what the fighters portend as makers of change. It starts by exploring the roots of fighter political authority and how this means dramatic change and successor politics in the Muslim World. Eventually, too, it is about U.S. choices in a world that we helped spin out of control. Its message: U.S. strategy should embrace authentic political formation, i.e., new governance for Arab Islam, while selectively targeting for destruction those that threaten us directly.

What does our current situation tell us about the future? Below is a brief on where we stand.

- The United States has nurtured, and is fighting, two enemies in the Muslim World: “Wilderness Ghazi,” called Jihadis by many, and “Civil Militia,” fighter groups linked to communities. Both represent powerful currents of change. Future political formation is likely to be initiated by their force and energies.
- However, their goals (visions of new governance) are distinctly different. These movements also represent different cultural and ideological traditions within Islam. Their roots are both intertwined and opposed in the Muslim past, and so they represent traditions in ideological and cultural competition.
- Ideological and cultural differences also mean different political directions for Islam. These two change-movements seek to overthrow and replace the old establishment in the Muslim World. But how they each evolve will point to very different models of successor-state politics.
- Post-colonial establishments in the Muslim World, that is, all of the regimes we call “allies and friends,” are nearing an end. Furthermore, the United States has intervened in Islam so as to force political change there. Muslims believe History itself is at hand, and their expectations now seek a political successor world. All this is underwritten by heightened Muslim identity, and it spells the end of the Arab *ancien régime*.
- America's invasion of Iraq has served to incubate Muslim change-movements and elevate the activity of fighting groups. Change through Islamist insurgency is almost inevitable, *no matter what the “outcome” in Iraq*.
- U.S. activity over the mid-term is unlikely to retrieve change that American actions have unleashed. It is more likely that continuing U.S. activity in the Muslim World will accelerate change, opening up yet more space for new political realities.
- Chaos and political transformation in the Muslim—and especially the Arab—World offer seductive leadership opportunities for fighting movements, so insurgent groups inevitably represent combustible political formation as well.
- Nevertheless, Civil Militia and Wilderness Ghazi promise very different politics. Because Civil Militia are locally rooted, we can approach them locally, whereas Wilderness Ghazi are universalistic in their agenda and so must be faced globally. It is pure opportunity for us that Civil Militia and Wilderness Ghazi visions are not simply different, but potentially opposed.
- Thus even if the United States can no longer repress change in the region, or hope to promote preferred American political models, we may be able to exploit the divergent worldviews of competing enemies. If we can split two visions of Islam, we might marginalize one while embracing the other.
- Will we, can we, so fundamentally change our convictions about the fateful course we have taken against the world of Islam? The change we set in motion also, ultimately, changes our world as well as theirs—reworking the very heart of History.

"Non-State Actors" and Change in the Muslim World

Pentagon language tells us that "non-state actors" attacked the United States on September 11, 2001. Since then we have waged a war against them. However, there are two kinds of non-state actors in the world of Islam. One represents the apocalyptic vision of Islam's very origins. The other speaks to a historical tradition that has emerged over the intervening centuries to speak for the life of most Muslims today. Both are expressions of fundamental change-forces in the Muslim World. Both are in competition for Islam's future—so they also represent choices for change in the Muslim World. We are fighting these non-state actors today. This is a mistake. We should fight only the vision that attacked us, the apocalyptic vision whose living reality is uncomfortable to most Muslims. We should encourage the competing vision of change, rooted in Muslim historical traditions, which other non-state actors represent.

This is a war against non-state actors. The United States has officially allied itself with state regimes that have been fighting these non-state actors for decades.

The threat from non-state actors seems to be something new. To us, "national security threats" have almost always meant other nation-states. Yet what we see today as non-state threats, especially within the Muslim World, may not be new at all but rather very, very old.¹

Furthermore, we are fighting not simply one, but two non-state actors.

Call one "Wilderness Ghazi"—who yearn to go in the steps of Muhammad himself, sweeping down from the mountains with his band of brothers to uplift the Arabs from their corrupted state. In later centuries they came to inhabit the Muslim imagination as warrior-poets fighting a forever-Jihad along the frontiers of the *Dar Al-Islam*.²

¹Before 9-11, it could be argued, there was no such thing as "The Muslim World," rather, there were many variegated and richly different Muslim "worlds." But it could also have been argued that for every individual Muslim there were always several coexistent, even competing identities in play: that of family and clan, of tribe, of sect, of nation, of language and offshoot civilization, and only, at last, *Muslim*. Old arguments about identity (and about their relative order and importance) have been interrupted by the accumulating power of events since 9-11. They have shaped a narrative that has thrust Muslim identity, collective and universal, to the fore. Islam itself is seen as under attack, and the Ummah as a whole approaches its moment of truth. The sway of a collective imagination—made so accessible now by the Internet, cellular phone networks, and new media like *Al Jazeera*—gives form to a Muslim World. But ... we should not forget that there is still an inner *Arab* core to this world in which all Muslims see change as most urgent and resistance most needed, and gives Islamist visions their greatest authority.

²Stories of Ghazi (*gaza* means "ideology of holy war") spirit, even in historical times, are enshrined as literary traditions and folklore. For Arab fighters on the long Byzantine frontier in the 8th through 10th centuries, and Turkish bands in Western Anatolia in the 13th and 14th centuries, the Ghazi resonance among Muslims is mythic rather than historically observed. For the emergence of literary mythology, see Michael Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier*, Yale, 1997, and Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, Berkeley, 1995.

Think of the other, in contrast, as "Civil Militia"—defenders of Muslim communities under attack, from either Tyrant within or Invader without. These are locally inspired and civically minded corps that nonetheless also fight for a broader vision of the Ummah as a whole, that is, a historical record of struggle for a just and "rightly guided" Muslim Society.³

Thus the non-state actor in the world of Islam is enshrined in Muslim tradition. But this is a split tradition: if today's Al Qaeda look a bit like the Assassins of 13th century Syria, the Ulama-led militias of Iraq, though they carry AK-47s and Bazalt RPGs, might seem like locally led forces from Buyid or Ayyubid times, bearing scimitar and recurve bow.

The divergence in tradition is critical. The Wilderness Ghazi hearken to a mythic Muslim tradition, while the Civil Militia speak to a long-accumulating historical track record. One is almost wholly visionary, while the other is grounded in law's precedents.

Furthermore, these Muslim fighting groups identify with traditions of righteous conflict that center especially on times of upheaval. But the passionate times when tyrants fall before rebellion and revolution, or when invading unbelievers are expelled, are also times when new leadership emerges within the *Dar Al-Islam*. Thus the most important thing to understand about Muslim non-state actors is that their special authority to act in the defense of Islam—granted by custom and religious blessing—is linked to the prospect of future political leadership.

If Islam gives them special authority as selfless fighters defending the Ummah, tradition also has many stories of non-state warrior actors who transform themselves during crisis to become future leaders, moving from righteous defender to legitimate ruler.

The United States has created just such an expectation through its invasion of Iraq. Both Wilderness Ghazi and Civil Militia are dramatically represented there as fighting the invader. Moreover, this fight is seen as central to a much bigger struggle against Muslim tyrants, who have been seen for decades as willing, corrupted clients of the invader.

But it is a messy struggle in the making, with many, many fighting groups forming and rising up across the Muslim World. If two fighting traditions broadly shape the

³Resistance from more organized and politically sophisticated urban communities reminds Muslims of equally romanticized traditions of struggles against Crusader principalities and the great Mongol assault on the cities of Iraq in 1258, leaving a still-forceful legacy for Muslims today, not as fable, but as living historical record. The Civil Militia military context is well summarized in Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, Routledge, 2000, 439–445.

struggle, they too represent a messy heterogeneity.⁴ The Muslim non-state fighting template offers no easy guide to interested U.S. policy makers.

Non-state actors have become central to change in the "Middle East." Six questions must be answered:

1. Civil Militia and Wilderness Ghazi speak to the authority of History itself in Muslim identity and tradition, but these are two very different visions of historical change. If they represent competing change-agendas, does this suggest an eventual political–military face-off within Islam?
2. The change-dynamic in the Middle East creates leadership opportunities for Islamist fighting groups. Which fighting tradition is better suited to exploit chaotic conditions as the established Muslim World begins to implode?
3. Can Islamist fighter groups really create new Muslim leadership models? Is there a practical path to their revolution, or must political big change in societies so long ruled by tyrants remain the handmaiden of calamity?
4. The United States confronts two different Muslim fighter models. Is it possible to parse them: to destroy one while building a relationship with the other? Can competition between Wilderness Ghazi and Civil Militia work to our advantage?
5. Initially the United States chose to accelerate change in the Muslim World. But if it becomes the wrong kind of change, and threatens us, can we still pull back and leash it? Can the bringer of change, change his guise? Can we still adapt to what we have done?
6. Thus, unwittingly, the United States has promoted future fighter group leadership in the Muslim World, and this could be only the beginning. What should we do if promotion turns into a cascade of change?

Who Owns History?

Americans seem to believe, mistakenly, that the struggle within Islam is a sort of "civil war" between moderates and radicals. As it is often framed in Washington, there is a "legitimate" Islamic belief system now under assault from what amounts to a "perversion of Islam," the so-called Jihadi belief system. This is the standard framework underpinning U.S. strategy in this war—and (*again*) it is almost wholly wrong.

⁴A recent Iraqi tally of insurgent groups shows about 20 Civil Militia (if all main Kurdish and Shi'a fighter groups are included; not all of these are currently insurgent); Wilderness Ghazi number around 10. All this from Samir Haddad and Mazin Ghazi, "An Inventory of Iraqi Resistance Groups: Who Kills Hostages in Iraq?" *Al Zawra* (Baghdad), September 19, 2004, <http://www.fas.org/irp/news/2004/09/az091904.html>.

The dichotomy between Civil Militia and Wilderness Ghazi bears no resemblance to the easy equation of moderate vs. radical. Both fighting groups are revolutionary in the Muslim sense of seeking to violently overthrow the tyrant and expel the invader.

This is also a dichotomy within Islam, and it is at the heart of the current conflict within Islam. It is not a split, by extension, necessarily between what is legitimate and what is not. It is rather a root divergence between two organizing authorities for History itself: between revealed "salvation history" and actual historical traditions. Moreover, the Wilderness Ghazi and the Civil Militia warrior paradigms can be said to represent the fighting expression—the military agents—of each tradition.

Why the warrior emphasis? Both Warrior Ghazi and Civil Militia represent archetypal Muslim "answers," i.e., forms of crisis-response, to deal with the problem of Islam under attack. "Attack" implies either internal corruption and tyranny, or external invasion, or both. Thus it is understood that both tyranny and invasion are equally threats to Islam. What's more, while external threats to the Ummah imply active defense, they are also characteristically linked to internal decay, corruption, and tyranny. How else could the Ummah become so vulnerable? So in longstanding tradition and story, fighting defense is also tied to necessary and inevitable Islamic renewal. This is certainly understood today in terms of the American invasion of the *Dar Al-Islam*—intimately tied to the corruption and tyranny of American client regimes.

Therefore the crisis in Islam that brings forth both Civil Militia and Wilderness Ghazi is about defending the *Dar Al-Islam* under attack and renewing a corrupted Ummah. Its contemporary urgency is informed and even framed by old narratives of Muslim struggle and transcendence, including at root the original narrative itself. Thus the difference between Civil Militia and Wilderness Ghazi also represents the difference between two different "existential answers" in terms of how the vision of Muslim identity and tradition can be defended and renewed.

What are the two existential answers that frame Muslims' ideas of History? What is salvation history? How is it different from real history and recorded tradition? Why is it important to our understanding of contemporary Islam?

The great Quranic scholar John Wansbrough came to understand that the narrative of Islamic origins was not, in fact, recorded history, not even in its most prejudiced sense. Rather, he suggested that the entire sacred canon of Islam, from the Qur'an to its commentaries to the biographies of the Prophet to the Sunnah, should be approached as literature.

In framing the problem of Islamic origins this way, Wansbrough does not mean that the sacred canon is make-believe. *He is not saying that it did not really happen.* To the contrary, Wansbrough is saying that Islam's sacred canon was never intended as History, but rather was meant to deliver the compelling message of God's revelation to Man. Its stories do not exist to establish what happened. They exist instead to establish the enduring basis for meaning, identity, and belonging; thus, they are sacred, or salvation, history.⁵

Furthermore, the body of Islamic literature did not get written down for close to two centuries. Its core, the Qur'an, was not revealed all at once and written down complete. The sayings and acts of Muhammad were not meticulously transmitted by word of mouth for over a century. Nothing appeared in the form we know today until the 9th century, 150+ years after Muhammad's death. *To repeat: there are almost no original written materials from the 7th and 8th centuries.* What we have shows variation and alteration, not early consolidation.⁶

Thus it is likely that Islamic doctrine and theology developed in a haphazard and multigenerational fashion, with this evolution expressed through literary variations that were finally canonized only in the 9th century. The physical evidence from these times—*what very little there is*—in fact tends to bear out an evolutionary development for Islam.⁷

⁵Wansbrough's writings are incredibly difficult to read, and yet they have transformed how we think about Islamic origins. See especially *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Oxford, 1978, and *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford, 1977. His life and impact are remembered in a 2002 radio interview with Gerald Hawting, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/re/rpt/stories/s591483.htm>.

⁶A fairly recent popular summary of upheavals over Islamic origins is in Toby Lester, "What is the Koran?" *The Atlantic Monthly*, January 1999. For some deeper and more critical discussions, see, for example, Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study*, Cambridge, 1981; Albrecht Noth and Lawrence Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*, Darwin, 1994; Jere Bachrach, Lawrence Conrad, and Patricia Crone, *Studies in Early Islamic History*, Darwin, 1996; Averil Cameron and Lawrence Conrad, *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Middle East: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, Darwin, 1992; Suliman Bashear, *The Arabs and Others in Early Islam*, Darwin, 1997. In the ongoing debate, even mainstream scholars like Fred Donner agree that Islam's sacred canon evolved organically, rather than emerging whole in a single fabulous generation; Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, Darwin, 1998.

⁷Popular recent historians are circumspect and skirt the hot spots of heresy in Muslim eyes: "The Arabic sources which narrate the life of Muhammad and the formation of a community around him are later in date; the first biographer whose work we know *did not write until more than a century after Muhammad's death.* Sources written in other languages fully attest to the conquest of an empire by the Arabs, but what they say about the mission of Muhammad is *different from what the Muslim tradition says ...* On the other hand, there seems to be little reason to doubt that the Qur'an is substantially a document of seventh-century Arabia, *although it may have taken some time to assume its definitive literary form.* Moreover, there seem to be elements in the traditional biographies and histories *which are not likely to have been invented.*" Thus Albert Hourani's navigation (*A History of the Arab Peoples*, Harvard, 1991, 15) quietly confesses four key issues in Islamic sacred history, italicized in this excerpted passage: (1) there are no original Arab written sources, (2) the original sources we have suggest a very different narrative for early

Why is this important to the war we are fighting today? Wilderness Ghazi groups inhabit a peculiar neo-Jihad reality framework. Theirs is a belief system, self-consciously pieced together from the literary canon of Islam's first centuries. This is important for two reasons. First, it means that the Wilderness Ghazi worldview expresses the perspectives, issues, and debates that defined reality for the earliest Muslim generations—even though the Ghazi may not truly understand this. Second, the foundation for individual and group example is literary rather than historical, that is, Wilderness Ghazi groups are pursuing idealized, even heroically generic, methods and models. Thus there is no historically grounded "Method of Muhammad"⁸ to follow, but only the guiding framework of mythic literary conventions.

In contrast to the neo-Jihad vision, Muslim society and civilization as a whole evolved after the 9th century into a sophisticated and "normal" world. Laws, social conventions, and political rules grounded in the experience of real rather than salvation history became the legitimating foundation of Society. Moreover, these were truly "historical" traditions in that they were recorded and available for social guidance and the adjudication of disputes. And, as with all written historical traditions, they were constantly updated and reinterpreted as times changed. Even within Islam, change has meant recodification, however glacial and grudging that process seems to us.

What appears to have happened in Islam is that after the original narrative and its stories were canonized in the 9th century they gradually came to occupy a place of revered but mediated authority, while their original meaning became gradually more mystically distant. Ancient messages once clear became obscured, and the disputes they had once resolved, forgotten. Succeeding historical tradition and its application by contemporary authority took over the urgent day-to-day of new messages and new disputes, but the canon and its fiery power are still there to be summoned by the self-anointed.

In contrast, self-anointed Wilderness Ghazi try to live in the long-frozen world of the 7th and 8th centuries, oblivious to the actual issues its verses and stories once sought to address. Nonetheless, they still believe that its law has absolute historical precedence. Believing this, the Ghazi must view all later historical traditions—like true defenders of the faith from ancient times transported into a shocking

Islam, (3) the Qur'an, but the Sunnah especially, did not gel into recognizable form until the 9th (or the 3rd Islamic) century and (4) much of this sacred canon was in fact "invented," as Hourani admits, and thus is truly "literary" in form and substance.

⁸Mary R. Habeck, "Following the Method of Mohammad: Jihadist Strategies in the War on Terror," Heritage Lecture, August 12, 2004, <http://www.townhall.com/audio/CONTENT/lehrman-081204.ram>.

future—as corrupt and heretical blows to the proper order of things originally given (for the once and final time) by God. Paradoxically, *in the uniquely apocalyptic character of this worldview*, the neo-Jihad vision brings us face-to-face with the world of Late Antiquity.⁹

This is the real dichotomy: between Islamic history “sacred and profane.” It will be difficult for Muslims to resolve, and it has no recognizable counterpart in Western reality. Today’s Wilderness Ghazi have seized upon Islam’s original literary canon and used it to deny the entire body of subsequent Muslim historical traditions for living. This puts Muslims in an existential bind. They cannot, like Christians and Jews, merely consign their sacred canon to the official status of salvation history, because for Muslims an essential part of what makes it sacred is the conviction that it is also *actual history*. Therefore, by extension, they cannot deny its authority to speak to modern Muslims.

Before the rise of the new Jihadis, Muslims had dealt with their dichotomy simply through accumulated custom: they assigned their literary canon to a place where theology could be mediated and thus protected by religious authorities. In other words, an explosive and apocalyptic original canon somehow was made tame for normal living. The difficulty, however, is that Islamic canon is irrepressible. It continues to speak on all aspects of living, *and also equally to all Muslims*. Therefore it is impossible to keep its influence “safe” through the mediation of a priestly class. The neo-Jihad vision is an inevitable expression of Islam’s essentially democratic approach to theological authority.

Furthermore, because the canon is sacred it cannot be seen as something that emerged merely to address archaic issues. And because the canon is also anointed as real history, it cannot be seen as mythical and thus as distant or indirect authority only. It cannot simply speak to Muslims as parable, with all the weight of indirective wisdom that parable embodies; it must go further and embody directive scriptural *and legal* authority as well. Therefore the canon has precedence over all succeeding traditions that claim to be built upon it.

The agonizing difficulties this creates for Muslims shows most clearly in the use of the term “Jihad” itself.

⁹Rethinking the historical origins of Islam should be seen within a larger rethinking of Late Antiquity, i.e., the end of the Greco-Roman World in the 7th century. Our new vantage on the end of antiquity began with a seminal work by Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, Thames and Hudson, 1971. A good current introduction is John Bowersock, Oleg Grabar, and Peter Brown, *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, Belknap, 2001. It outlines the unique character of the late-6th, early-7th century Greco-Roman world and how it shaped the belief system of the first Jihadis. More chilling evidence for the “why” of a 7th century apocalypse—and the melancholy coming apart of the world of antiquity—is in J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City*, Oxford, 2001, and Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy, AD 300–900*, Cambridge, 2001.

The new Jihadis appropriate the concept of Jihad from the political–religious context of the 7th and 8th centuries, a context that was both universalistic and apocalyptic to its core. As from the Greek *apokalupsis*, this meant in one sense the material fulfilment of God’s last “revelation” to Man, as unifying the whole world within his word. But it was apocalyptic too in the sense that early Muslims believed Jihad to be the fulfilment of biblical prophesy as well: the very culmination of History as “end times.”¹⁰

Historical Islam (9th century and after), in contrast, had to adapt creatively to the failure of the original Jihad to take down the Roman (Byzantine) Empire, and thus the failure to fulfill God’s calling. Failure made it necessary to defuse Jihad. The concept itself was too central to be discarded, so it was steered toward other venues of spiritual struggle: limited, politically authorized, defensive (and occasionally offensive) military action.¹¹

Apocalyptic Jihad was thus harnessed to an evolving Islamic tradition. But it could never be fully “dewatted” and made non-firing. Now, suddenly, there is again a creative and insurgent “tradition” that trumpets the authority of the original, even if often ignorant of its original context. By appropriating Islam’s sacred canon and re-infusing it with its original apocalyptic message, the new Jihadis put a truly existential choice to all Muslims. This choice would be meaningless if the Muslim World, i.e., the Ummah, was not in such a wretched and corrupt state. Moreover, *as Muslims see it*, the apocalyptic calling of a neo-Jihad vision could have no claim on them without today’s overwhelming fact: unbeliever invaders are desecrating the world of Islam, and thus the world Muslims made has failed. The majority of Muslims may come to reject the Wilderness Ghazi appropriation of sacred tradition, but they cannot avoid the consequences of its message.

The choice is not about whether one is a “fundamentalist” or not, whatever that word means in Muslim terms. Nor is it a choice about “political power for Islam” as American interlocutors like Habeck have presented to Washington policy audiences.¹² It is a much bigger issue of human action today in terms of Muslims’ own expectations of themselves about their role in the future of History. Thus the new Jihadis have framed—however unwittingly—a collective prospect for all Muslims that must be addressed. Will Islam

¹⁰See especially David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, Darwin, 2003. Cook’s work brings into sharp focus how the spiritual–emotional environment at the end of antiquity still drives the worldview of today’s Wilderness Ghazi. Some of his essays are available at <http://www.mille.org/whatsnew.html>.

¹¹Roy Parviz Mottahedeh and Ridwan al-Sayyid, “The Idea of Jihad in Islam before the Crusades,” in Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh, *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, Dumbarton Oaks, 2001.

¹²Mary R. Habeck, “Following the Method of Mohammad.”

transcend its current wretched state? Or will it be defeated and reviled forever in the eyes of God? Can the Ummah triumph and still accommodate the West? The significant achievement of the Wilderness Ghazi is thus not their own victory but rather their success in forcing Muslims to face Islam's original framework of History. They have made continued avoidance of its gaze impossible.

What is to be done? This is the urgent question for Muslims. It goes well beyond the adjuration that "Muslims themselves must have this conversation."¹³ It goes well beyond the venue even of "conversation" and right to the heart of the idea of Islam itself. It also goes to the heart of the relationship between Wilderness Ghazi and the Ummah as a whole, which is more complex and ambiguous than generally acknowledged by American "experts." Thus at last it also goes to the heart of the struggle within Islam, which, rather than being a conflict between the perverse and the correct, should be understood instead—on Muslim terms—as the creative if violent mediation between past, present, and future in terms of ultimate human meaning and purpose.

Hence the authority claimed by Wilderness Ghazi groups has an existential foundation. The Ummah is clearly in danger, and no state regime can rescue it. But Civil Militia movements are also a response, in varying degree, to a similar urgency of threat. They also see looming danger in an invader, and they know all too well how the regimes that still rule them are dissolutely complicit in the danger itself.

Yet they focus on renewal in their own communities. Moreover, their piety is informed by historical and community traditions and not a creatively reassembled belief system. Thus Wilderness Ghazi and Civil Militia movements represent different cultural expressions. They also contrast two divergent visions of Muslim Restoration:

- The Wilderness Ghazi are essentially literary in their construction of reality, whereas Civil Militia warriors hearken to historical antecedents.
- The Wilderness Ghazi social formation is fellowship-based, self-identified, and a closed-circle, resonating (again, in literary fashion) to *Al Ansar*, the brothers of Muhammad.¹⁴ Marc Sageman describes this process in compelling terms.¹⁵ In contrast, the Civil Militia are a socially organic part of their community. Their social hierarchies mirror those of their larger community, while

¹³Habeck, op.cit.

¹⁴*Ansar* translates properly to "companions," but might usefully be likened to the English usage of "brothers" still fondly remembered in *Henry V*: "We band of brothers"

¹⁵Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, University of Pennsylvania, April 2004.

their sense of calling and loyalty is rooted in predominantly local goals.

- The Warrior Ghazi speak from the authority of an ascetic environment, and so their approach to political rule tends to be authoritarian, ruling by fiat; the Civil Militia remain politically part of a collective and (informally) constitutional context. The Warrior Ghazi are authentic outsiders.
- The Warrior Ghazi are apocalyptic in their message, as the bearers of revelation, while the Civil Militia are much more grounded in the life of society and the needs of people. And although the Civil Militia warrior is an organic community defender, the Wilderness Ghazi can only assert governing authority through what amounts to conquest.
- The worldview of the Warrior Ghazi is universalistic first, seeking Muslim Restoration within its original literary context, wherein the whole Ummah is united. By contrast, the Civil Militia have more modest local goals, although these are representative of enshrined Muslim objectives for the whole.
- This divergence translates into fundamentally different, even opposed, visions of the "rightly guided path" and thus also of Muslim Restoration.

Even with these differences, both subcultures and their visions share something too in their struggle:

- In the overarching legitimacy of the struggle itself, and through struggle, transcendence
- In the desperate urgency of the situation and its imperative demand that all Muslims, in whatever capacity, respond
- In the belief that the very process of resistance and its power is a transformative experience for the entire Ummah
- In the centrality of *piety* as the core motivation for action, and thus the possibility of self-sacrifice as well

Remember, this is a comparison of two *fighting* or warrior subcultural phenomena that emerged in the emotively heightened context of conflict in Iraq. Thus their antecedent models are less important than what they now urgently represent to Muslims everywhere.

Civil Militia movements in Iraq should therefore not be confused with, say, traditional tribal leadership or Ulama-mediated community. In the case of Shi'a movements, there is a clear antecedence in the emergence of Hezbollah in Lebanon after the Israeli invasion. But Hezbollah cannot speak with the electric clarity of a narrative of deliverance and restoration. Likewise, Wilderness Ghazi groups operating in Iraq should not be confused with the uniquely artificial, self-created Al Qaeda–Taliban construct in Afghanistan before 2001—essentially filibustering at the

margins of Muslim consciousness. In contrast, the fight against the "Mongol" American invader and its "apostate puppets" has a hallowed place in the Muslim heart.¹⁶ Rather than literary precedent, most Muslims respond to real stories from real history.

Literary or historical, the change-action in the Muslim World today is with the fighters. We should focus on the evolution of fighting groups *and* their potential to become a basis of new political formation. *By defining fighters only as "insurgents" within the American ideological compass—in other words, illegitimate rebellion—we disallow ourselves the opportunity to observe these groups as entering-wedge leaders in political and cultural change. We also then have difficulty analyzing their actual relationship with Muslim communities.*

We should understand that for Muslims, today's narrative of struggle unfolds from a beckoning past, reasserting its powerful and familiar stories that move fighters irresistibly toward visions of leadership. Thus the struggle dramatically transforms the terms of political leadership.

Compressed change is characteristic of insurgencies throughout history. We have our own example in the American Revolution. Say there had been no violent revolution in the Colonies. A political compromise ratifying *de facto* American autonomy—prefiguring the course Britain would take with its future "dominions"—would have anointed the colonial establishment of 1770. But prehostilities' leaders were not the insurgent victors of a decade later; *an 18th century American dominion would have had a very different political leadership*, including "Tory" pro-British political figures. George Washington and our Founders, in contrast, were the radicals.¹⁷ They rose out of protracted struggle and a great war. Should we expect anything different from such conflict in the Muslim World?

Change and Insurgent Opportunity

Above all, the United States is the bringer of change to the Muslim World and has nurtured both Wilderness Ghazi and Civil Militia. We have also announced, through the invasion of Iraq, the historical end of the Arab *ancien régime*. We are the force doing to the Arab tyrants and kings what

¹⁶At a recent CIA conference, several Iraqis testified about how the experience of the U.S. invasion and its aftermath immediately and viscerally took on an emotional tie to the Mongol assault of 1258. Passionate pride in defense and hatred of the American invader among Civil Militia (Muqtada al-Sadr) are spelled out in Edward Wong, "On Bagdad Streets, Loyalty to Rebel Cleric is Still Fierce" *New York Times*, October 4, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/04/international/middleeast/04militia.html?ex=1102827600&en=73d611a4b902b435&ei=5070&ref=login>.

¹⁷Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Vintage Books, 1992. Yes, the Founders were true political radicals in a British social reality, driven by the corruption of Monarch-centric patronage.

World War I did to the old empires of Europe and the Middle East. But this possibility is as difficult for us to take seriously as it would have been for an observer in 1914. No one then would have said that Austria-Hungary, the Russian Empire, or the Ottoman Sultanate would soon be history, but elites on the inside of those rotten enterprises knew better. They knew they had no long-term future without reform. Reform was urgent, but also, somehow, simply could not be implemented. It is never in the interest of old elites to wilfully be the cause of their own undoing. Yet each empire had suffered for decades from radicals, incendiaries, and especially liberals among them, prefiguring their fate. Then war and fate came in a rush.

Après Moi, ... ?

America is to the inner Muslim World like war was to Europe after 1914. Thus rising Wilderness Ghazi and Civil Militia warrior paradigms are the children of change. If the moment of its full announcement is even years away, its universal expectation—created by the U.S. invasion of Iraq—is here.

Before the war, change in the Muslim Arab World had few prospects. Arab elites that had once and long ago been champions of change (especially in Egypt) had become an old ruling establishment. They were the resisters of change, and their status quo rule came to represent the benchmark of "stability" and so the perpetual goal of prewar U.S. policy. "Change" was rhetorically pushed into the indefinite future or otherwise framed as mere hope for material improvement in people's way of life. Political change in the American sense of the "good," i.e., representative government and democratic institutions, was generally acknowledged to be "unrealistic." In contrast, all other sorts of political change thus implied revolution and a descent into "chaos" and the primitive. There could be no real change, only "pressure" ... and "good policy" can always manage pressure.

So it may still be standard procedure to refer to the prospect of change in the Arab World today as pressure on traditional relationships, whether between old regimes and the societies they rule or between both society and regime and their longstanding relationship with the United States. It would nevertheless be a mistake to continue in the mindset language of old status quo after we have chosen to violently destroy it. If pressure was once a symptom of big change that could be managed and contained, it now looks more like signs and portents of a very different future.

How might the 1914 metaphor be applied to the inner Muslim World today? What do we remember being present in the fall of Old Europe? If we look at the old Middle East establishment, what do we see?

- *Brittleness of the Old.* Traditional structures of rule are fragile, and change is an awaited expectation among Muslims. This contrasts to the relative stability (and containable state-to-state conflict) we became accustomed to over these past 25 years. The region is poised for big change even though things may seem superficially stable. Like the brittle European and Levantine empires in 1914, this comparison is starkest in the corruption and cracking authority of longstanding ruling establishments. Their survival depends increasingly on internal security forces and selling the people the conviction that such forces will always put down even the most restive movements for change. Thus old rulers can pretend not to care that they are American satraps; their only authority, American authority.
- *The Force.* The United States has decisively legitimated and accelerated change. In historical terms the invasion of Iraq was both the announcement and the first great event of an era of transformation. American leaders sought to shape the space that they opened up, but they are now no more than participants in what they unleashed. Two aspects of U.S. intervention in the region remain significant. First, there is no believable path back to the *status quo ante*: the regional framework that America ran for 25 years. Second, strategic pressures are likely to encourage more, rather than less, U.S. change-initiatives. Thus the prospect of big change in 10 years or less.
- *The Energy.* The region is now highly networked in terms of Muslim identity. Events in one place impact the region as a whole. A normally quietist Muslim identity has been distorted by this change-dynamic, and Muslims now feel collectively connected as participants in a larger struggle—both within Islam and against the invader. Insurgent movements intensify an energy of collective effort and, operationally networked across the region, mirror it as well. Furthermore, if insurgents undercut the legitimacy of one regime, all feel the subsequent erosion.
- *The Instrument.* Muslims increasingly identify insurgent fighting groups—whether Civil Militia or Wilderness Ghazi—as the Ummah’s once-and-future change-agents. This is a movement of emotional-cultural legitimation, driven by the dramatic narrative of American occupation of Iraq. Hence insurgents are gradually becoming, through their relationship with U.S. activity in the Muslim World, *the expected basis for future Muslim political formation*. And so insurgency begins to take on a sort of successor authority in the Muslim mind.

Bringer of Change

The United States and insurgent movements are thus paradoxically working together to push change. Change grows

from the inextricable U.S.–Insurgent relationship. It may seem to us like straightforward combat, but to Muslims it is a grander struggle whose eventual realization promises “deliverance,” a cultural metaphor hallowed in Islamic tradition.

This is the “big takeaway” that Americans still cannot see:

Having made the unconfessed decision to forestall change in the Arab Muslim World, the United States has since then become the unwitting bringer of change, and is now the main force not simply for change but for upheaval. And we started this in 1980.

The United States funded, armed, and trained the greatest Jihad in the modern Muslim experience.¹⁸ Not only this, the Afghani Jihad became the incubator of a renaissance Warrior Ghazi movement. Then, in the 1990s, U.S. sanctions on Iraq created historical change-space there, as Gilles Kepel recounts:

Iraq under sanctions was governed by a welfare-state system of a fascist or communist type, where the ruler bought social peace by limited redistribution of oil wealth. This was of course built on tremendous coercion and violence, including genocide against the Kurds in the late 1980s and the massacre of the Shi’a in 1991. This welfare system and what remained of Iraqi society was smashed under the decade-long embargo of the 1990s. As Saddam Hussein, his family and cronies controlled access to scarce goods people became organized via competitive tribal and religious affiliation. This, not the romanticized civil society of neocon imagination, is what was lurking within Iraqi society when the Saddam lid was removed.¹⁹

In addition, as their way of life eroded, individual Iraqis began to embrace Islamic piety as the framework of their world. So when U.S. forces entered Iraq they discovered new political formation already under way—and among its defenders as well, Civil Militia. This new political formation was infused with Islamic spirit. Americans simply could not see this for what it was. Moreover, by failing to quickly re-create civic order and political administration, we essentially extended the change-space, and its permissions, created by our invasion. Our occupation has been an incubator for alternative political models.

The United States continues to nurture today’s insurgencies within Islam.

Will U.S. activity continue to promote these insurgencies? What we do today contrasts starkly with former U.S. policy. Previous U.S. interventions were aggressive but selective. Our footprint was small, our behavior low-key. Today we are both aggressive and unabashedly “in your

¹⁸Recognition exhaustively treated in Stephen Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, Penguin, 2004.

¹⁹Gilles Kepel, “The War for Muslim Minds: An Interview with Gilles Kepel,” *opendemocracy.net*, September 11, 2004, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/debates/article-5-57-2216.jsp>.

face." The United States is clearly the invader. Moreover, our insistent pressure for local "support" of U.S. policy reveals U.S.-tethered regime life-support systems going full blast in Egypt, Pakistan, Jordan, and Arabia—lending their rulers the aspect of a naked retinue. *This is the popular Muslim view.*²⁰ Thus the U.S. invasion of Iraq puts regimes already on life-support under life-threatening pressure.

Here Iraq becomes the rogue variable driving big change.

Americans are now obsessed with handicapping Iraq "outcomes," as if Iraq is a self-contained problem. But what is important about Iraq is not just what happens there, "good" or "bad." What is important today is how Iraq encourages big change in the Muslim World as a whole. Therefore, even good results in Iraq create big problems for Arab client regimes. America's Arabian clients remain the center of gravity and the ultimate weak point of the U.S. strategic position.

"Waiting in the Wings"

U.S.-initiated change in the heart of classical Islam will, inevitably, cascade into the world of America's Arab clients. Change in Iraq, no matter what the "outcome," will rush across Arabia, especially Saudi Arabia. What's more, the power of change will depend on how insurgent models, i.e., Wilderness Ghazi and Civil Militia, develop. *Do they become the harbingers of future political formation in the Muslim World?*

It is fine to talk about Iraqi "futures," but not like we always do about how it affects us. Rather we should talk about what Iraq might mean for

- Potential new Muslim political formation
- Its potential as a broader "Muslim" model
- Its promise of future political legitimacy

Thus, when we talk about Iraqi "futures," we are not looking at different finished products or "outcomes" at all, but rather about different change-trajectories. Furthermore, all rocketing alternative paths share something in common *that we must not ignore*: they all lead directly to the wider Muslim World.

- *Failed state*: a Somali-like Iraq in the wake of premature U.S. withdrawal, following a collapse of formal

²⁰In these places any opinion research on Arab attitudes toward their "leaders" is notoriously suspect. But as Marc Lynch suggests in "Taking Arabs Seriously," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2003, the emergence of unfettered, independent, and transnational Arab media has opened the door to spontaneous (and anonymous) political expression: "Al Jazeera has infuriated virtually every Arab government at one point or another, and its programming allows for criticism and even mockery. Commentators regularly dismiss the existing Arab regimes as useless, self-interested, weak, compromised, corrupt, and worse. One recent al Jazeera talk show took as its topic the question, 'Have the existing Arab regimes become worse than colonialism?' The host, one of the guests, and 76 percent of callers said yes ..."

governance in Iraq. We could call this chaos, or more politely, "highly disaggregated governance." Primary political formation is at the local level, with symbolic authority only in national, sectarian, or ethnic association. Clearly this path requires tacit U.S. permission. This is no mere abandoning of Iraq but rather our willingness to abandon, no matter what the consequences. And the consequences of this path are severe. Willing abandonment legitimizes whatever follows in Iraq. What follows? Even political chaos is self-organizing. Allowed to develop on its own, new and authentic local political formation would emerge in Iraq that would likely be Islamist. Iraqi successor "states" would be exuberant too, encouraging "neighborly" intervention. Yet meddling neighbors would find themselves facing an unquenchable Islamist backflow from the former Iraq. Thus Saudi and Jordanian interventions especially become double-edged swords for the Arabian princes, or even Iran, promoting the very cross-pollination and migration of fighter traditions that intervention was meant to forestall.²¹ Think of this as the "Petrie dish" scenario for Islamist insurgency.

- *Perpetual "transition"*: the official Washington term for in-eradicated insurgency. This suggests an Iraq in seemingly perpetual occupation—and a puppet regime that cannot be crafted into a working independent state—because the country cannot be secured. But "perpetual" instability is politically and practically unsustainable. This path is less an "outcome" than it is a "time bomb" of failure. How long Americans cling to this outcome is less significant than the defeat-dynamic that it creates. Failure that is postponed is failure that cannot be addressed: it just sits there and grows. Gathering failure for the United States magisterially increases the authority of insurgent movements. However, the growing possibility of U.S. defeat threatens U.S. client regimes far more than Americans. An Arabian kingdom that has tied its survival to U.S.

²¹A possibility just now reaching the West, as reported by William Wallace and Mark Hubbard, "Saudi Arabia fears attacks from insurgents battle-hardened in Iraq," *Financial Times*, December 20, 2004, http://news.ft.com/cms/s/2a2631a8-522b-11d9-961a-00000e2511c8,ft_acl=s01=2.html. "The Saudis are very worried indeed," said a senior western diplomat in Riyadh. "The numbers of active Saudis in touch with the jihad in Iraq and Syria are probably in the low hundreds, but it would not take very many to lead to an upsurge in violence in Saudi itself." Prince Nayef has been quoted as saying, moreover, that "Iraq must not be a place for training terrorists, and they could be Saudis, like what happened in Afghanistan.... the situation in Iraq endangers not only the country and its people, but has also become a clear and dangerous threat to security and stability in the region." Ali Akbar Dareini, Associated Press, posted in Iraq.net, <http://www.iraq.net/displayarticle6031.html>. More recently, U.S. analysts have begun to notice. Iraq is revealed at last as "a training ground, a recruitment ground, the opportunity for enhancing technical skills," said David B. Low, the national intelligence officer for transnational threats. "There is even, under the best scenario, over time, the likelihood that some of the Jihadists who are not killed there will, in a sense, go home, wherever home is, and will therefore disperse to various other countries." Dana Priest, "Iraq New Terror Breeding Ground War Created Haven," *CIA Advisers Report*, *Washington Post*, January 14, 2005.

fortunes will go from crisis to crisis, anticipating the coming aftermath of long-postponed American defeat. Insurgent political formation draws its authority almost directly from the power of a narrative in which insurgency not simply wins, but also defeats the United States. Think of this as an American “incubator,” but unlike Afghanistan, in the heart of Classical Islam.

- *Iraqoslavia*,²² i.e., not simply partition but a dramatizing civil war. As with all of these situations, the framing drama of events is critically important to the change-dynamic. Thus civil war in Iraq represents U.S. failure because it requires, not unlike Yugoslavia, at least an initial American abstention. Such abstention suggests that the United States is either willing to withdraw (knowing that things will fall apart) or unwilling to intervene again to “rescue stability.” U.S. abstention inevitably legitimates the warring elements, tacitly encouraging their evolution. Insurgent movements develop into militarized political formations at war. Thus their activity effectively becomes a future Muslim model. Process leads to outcome. Insinuation of revolution begins (or has it already started?) with old Iraqi–Arabian tribal relationships. Meanwhile, “volunteers” from Jordan and Arabia, flocking to fight alongside their Sunni brethren in the former Iraq, become the soon-to-be-released vanguard of revolution in their own homes.²³ As a result, savage civil war in Iraq brings violent political change into Arabia. The Saudi Kingdom is soon forced to choose between renouncing and more deeply embracing the United States. Casting off the client yoke would open a weak and fractious society to assault and dissolution, but relying on a U.S. strong arm to survive would make the Saudi regime the next natural target of Islamist insurgency. Both Saudis and Americans know, the Kingdom cannot survive as our frontline vassal in the region—and suddenly (as Camus might aver) “it’s always too late, fortunately.”²⁴ This is the “pressure-cooker” scenario.
- *Islamic Republic*: a Shi’a religious state that takes its own approach rather than imitating Iran. To listen to some Arab imams, an Islamic Republic of Iraq would be quite moderate. Others, however, speak in darker tones. Moderate or radical, its Islamist character is in the end less important *than its Islamist existence*. A “rightly guided” Iraq would, by its very nature, be a beacon to the oppressed

²²This is a neologism of Stephen Schwartz, who covered the civil war in the former Yugoslavia. His intent was to encourage a more serious-minded U.S. effort in Iraq, in other words, not predicting civil war there but rather warning that consistently bad U.S. policy might take us there: “Beware Iraqoslavia,” TechCentralStation.com, February 2, 2004, <http://www.techcentralstation.com/020204C.html>.

²³Familial tribal ties that straddle—like those within the Dulaimi tribe—the Saudi–Iraqi border facilitate political cross-pollination. “Murhiz al-Dulaimi is a senior member of the Dulaimi tribe with a large following in the restive Province of Anbar which includes Ramadi and Falluja, the two cities which have spearheaded resistance to U.S. occupation,” and his recent comments to the Iraqi newspaper *Azzaman* gives a flavor to some of this. Mustafa Amara, “Iraqi Shiites fight on the side of insurgents in Falluja,” *Azzaman*, December 14, 2004, <http://www.azzaman.com/english/index.asp?fname=news\2004-12-9\10185.htm>.

²⁴Albert Camus, from *La Chute (The Fall)*, 1956.

Shi’a of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. It would be both a model to them and an assurance that help is on the way, and thus a sure wave of change in Arabia as a whole. A successful Islamic Republic in Iraq represents a mature political formation that would draw much of its achievement from its own Civil Militia model, making it a central part of its founding mythic narrative.²⁵ It would therefore be not only a model for further Islamist revolution and renewal in the Muslim World—it would enshrine the role of the Civil Militia warrior model in its realization. How an Islamic Republic of Iraq emerges will show how it draws on the energies of its warrior defenders. It might be a less highly charged model for revolution and renewal, but nonetheless renew the entire worldwide Shi’a cause.

Thus “outcomes that are not outcomes” highlight differences between change-forces in Iraq. Yet even simple storytelling scenarios suggest how change in Iraq also promotes change, almost immediately, in Arabia. Furthermore, it is the Islamic spirit of the insurgency that drives this possibility. On-scene sources attest to the indigenous quality of Iraqi Islamists. Rather than a massaged by-product of “foreign” Wahabbist agitation, which is the standard U.S. explanation, emotional commitment and piety are autochthonous, that is, they spring from native ground; and it’s all about God. So political formation in Iraq has an authenticity whose success directly threatens the false piety of the apostate Saudi regime.²⁶

Future paths in Iraq lead to or encourage Saudi crisis and inexorably pull along Jordan and others too. The dramatic impact of any Iraqi political realization achieved through successful insurgency simply cannot be overstated. Such success inevitably disrupts the fragile authoritarian ecology of Arabia—and soon.

Even as deliberately simple-minded stories, these “futures” highlight another common thread: the loss of American control. By making change the dominant dynamic of the region, the United States has signed away its claim on

²⁵For example, Abdul Aziz Al Hakim—first on the ballot of the Sistani-brokered United Iraqi Alliance and the leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) with command of the largest Arab militia in Iraq, the Badr Corps—boasts that he can provide 100,000 of his militia to protect polling places in the upcoming election, thus announcing the heroic story-to-be, where SCIRI becomes the decisive agent in the realization of a Shi’a Islamist Iraq. Karl Vick, “Lottery Sets Order of Ballot in Iraq: Officials Alarmed by Surge in Violence,” *Washington Post*, December 21, 2004, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A14851-2004Dec20.html?sub=AR>. Iraq’s Minister of Intelligence, General Mohammed Abdullah Shahwani, has declared Sunni capability, in counterpoint, as 200,000 insurgents (fighters and direct support). Agence France Presse, “Iraq battling more than 200,000 insurgents,” carried in *The Daily Star*, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=2&article_id=11487.

²⁶Nir Rosen, “It’s All Bad News: Chaos in Occupied Iraq,” *reasononline.com*, March 26, 2004, <http://reason.com/hod/nr032604.shtml>; “Fallujah: Inside the Iraqi Resistance,” *asiaonline.com*, July 15–December 9, 2004, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/others/Fallujah.html>. At a recent CIA conference on Iraq, Rosen was only one of several who commented on the sincere and authentically Islamist quality of Iraqi resistance.

the delicate tracery of relationships it has kept alive these many years.

How armed struggle (and its two insurgent models) becomes a catalyst of change, and also part of new political formation, deserves our attention.

Future Leadership for Fighter Groups?

Can Muslim non-state actors actually transition from insurgent fighter groups to aspiring political movements? Could they ultimately seize leadership in the Arab World?²⁷ What kind of leaders would they be?

If non-state actors, and the United States itself, are driving change and conflict in the Muslim World, why can we not see this? First, although fighter movements are a distinctive part of Islamic tradition, this tradition is alien to us. Moreover, it is part of both universalistic and local community Muslim traditions—outside of how we organize reality according to the nation-state. Hence we see only non-state actors and illegitimacy, because in our eyes they operate outside of our traditions “of the state.” Our language helps us deny the reality of our own experience—the fighting relationship in which American and fighter activities paradoxically work together and reinforce each other.

So we sense, but cannot truly see, how the United States serves as “The Other.” We are shaping an environment in which fighter groups are legitimated as the defenders of Islam under attack. But going further, we are also ratifying the fighter groups as the Ummah’s future leaders. Thus, how Muslim non-state actors become true threats to the U.S. position in the region is also ironically how these same fighter groups become the future’s authentic leaders. Have we even begun to think about this? And how might the war accelerate this legitimization?

Furthermore, by setting up a Manichaeic struggle (in Muslim eyes) between *Islamist Defender* and *American Other*, alternative renewal movements within Islam must change their tune. The entire Islamist paradigm itself is being reworked,²⁸ forcing non-violent New Islamists, who compete with various Islamist fighter groups for ownership of the Muslim future, to urgently rethink their role in the

²⁷How strong is the Arab Ghazi tradition vis-à-vis the larger Muslim World? See how its mythic authority migrates easily, as it did to Medieval Turks—hence its strength in Pakistan, Kashmir, and the Philippines and its seductive pull in Morocco, Indonesia, and Nigeria: the frontiers of today’s forever-Jihad.

²⁸Vali Nasr (Naval Postgraduate School) suggests that the Islamic change-space, both political ideology and theology, is today much more fluid and creative than most American policy makers realize. The very shocks to the Islamic-Muslim “system” introduced by the United States have in fact fuelled an intellectual and spiritual re-examination. He treats some of these themes in “Regional Implications of Shi’a Revival in Iraq,” *Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2004.

gathering nimbus of Islamic restoration.²⁹ U.S.–Jihadi symbiosis unwittingly (from our standpoint) steers Muslims we most need for our goals of peaceful change down a different path. Thus the pressure and promise of Islamist insurgency represents more than a widening call to arms: it is new political philosophy (ideology) as well as new political formation.

What’s more, transformations of Muslim identity are not unknown to us. Palestinian national coalescence—an ethnogenesis from wholly amorphous identity—crystallized in a single generation.³⁰ The Palestinian Story is also a living example of how Arabs who followed the Western path of revolutionary nationalism were denied deliverance. Notably, neighboring Hezbollah boasts a triumphal narrative of realization rooted in Islamist spirit. No longer is there even a shred of promise for Muslims in embracing Western political models. Deliverance must be found in Islamic Restoration, a hallowed concept which, in contrast to failed Arab nationalist movements, can be achieved only through a truly collective Muslim effort. Thus today’s proto-mythologies build on shared “lessons of History.”

Yet there is more than a contrast between Islamist fighter groups that represent local constituencies and outsider fighter groups that have a more mythic, universalistic vision. It is a deeply *civilizational competition* between Civil Militia and Wilderness Ghazi. We need to track this competition.

For any of these groups to succeed in their journey they must successfully establish the underpinnings of authentic, new political leadership. These lie in the dimensions of authority, legitimization, and representation. For Wilderness Ghazi these underpinnings had to be worked up from almost nothing, whereas Civil Militia leadership foundations are often already strong within the community. Leadership development for both is arguably already advanced, but we cannot see this and so cannot track their progress:

²⁹Raymond Baker, *Islam Without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists*, Harvard, 2003. Baker persuasively suggests that quietist “New Islamists”—as demonstrated by their rise in Egyptian society—offer a tolerant and pluralistic change-alternative to violent revolution. But is History now passing them by?

³⁰“Ethnogenesis” is a concept that emerged among scholars of Late Antiquity to explain the emergence of “national” identities among the Germanic peoples who entered the Roman Empire in the 5th century. The concept “holds that the northern peoples, for the most part collectively referred to by the Romans as Germani, more specifically as Marcomanni, Alamanni, Goths, Vandals, Franks et al., derived their distinctive ‘ethnic’ or cultural identity, not from blood, language or a long history before contact with Rome, but from *political developments* which took place often during the process of migration itself.” Such national coalescence is eerily suggestive of Palestinian emergence. Quotation from C.E.V. Nixon’s review of Herwig Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples*, Berkeley, 1997, in *Electronic Antiquity*, The Virginia Polytechnic Institute, <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/EIAnt/V5N1/wolfram.html>.

- *In achieving symbolic (non-state) authority.* Symbolic authority must be granted before fighter groups can aspire to leadership. Authority to take up arms is fairly easily granted within Muslim historical tradition. It is one thing for fighters to portray themselves as predestined champions of Islam under attack; it is quite another, however, to be fully embraced by Muslims everywhere as a deliverer. In this way, Al Qaeda before 2001 may have been politically correct, but with only minor standing. Everything changed at once on 9-11. A single act suddenly elevated Al Qaeda in the eyes of many as a potential deliverer and not simply a symbolic defender of Islam. Yet the rapid collapse of its cause in Afghanistan reduced it again to a mere symbol: it had failed to assert itself as a deliverer. Thus symbolic authority is only a first step; the path that Islamic fighter groups must ascend is arduous. If the highest place of authority remains that of the true deliverer, of a Mahdi, then Iraq becomes ironically significant. U.S. invasion has given Al Qaeda that gift—out of nowhere—of true authority. They have their theater of deliverance, with the heart of Classical Islam as its stage. In contrast, Civil Militia draw symbolic authority from the urgency of struggle as defined by their community and their Ulama. The example of Muqtada al-Sadr at Najaf is suggestive even of fusion-like paths—Fighter Ulama!—to symbolic authority.
- *In achieving political-cultural (non-state) authority.* Being anointed as deliverer is the path to political and cultural authority as well. All Ghazi fighter groups begin as “voices in the wilderness”; other fighter groups are more closely tied to the life of Muslim society. Fighter groups that remain a part of their society are more likely to become local leaders. We have seen this already, both in the cities of the “Sunni Triangle” and in the Shi’a areas of Southern Iraq. Islamist fighter groups that thus represent natural local leadership also more classically fit Western notions of insurgency. Nonetheless, the passionately Islamist character of these fighters links them to the Wilderness Ghazi tradition of Al Qaeda. The problem for Ghazi fighter groups is that they are outsiders aspiring to leadership. Al Qaeda’s self-conscious transplantation into the wilderness highlights a contradiction in Ghazi tradition: fighters may be purified in the wilderness and thus present themselves as the only worthy defenders of Islam, but as outsiders their only path to leadership is through conquest. The wilderness tradition may hearken mythically to Muhammad and his companions, yet it creates a difficult path to eventual political leadership. Civil Militia leadership here is more natural, but also faces difficulties. Critically, how will fighter group relationships with local Ulama develop as both move together toward eventual governance?
- *In receiving de facto American legitimization.* If the United States has any “true” authority in the Muslim World, it is the authority to confer legitimacy on its Wilderness Ghazi and Civil Militia enemies. In fact the surest path for them is to have their struggle ratified by what they see as transcendental evil, in this case, the United States. But the drama of the struggle then must continue to meet universal expectations among Muslims. The Iraq narrative to date has delivered on that promise. Insurgent “resistance” appears (in the eyes of Muslims) to have weakened America and brought the cause they have championed close to victory. However, this narrative has been largely made possible by U.S. actions. Consequently, it is not just American engagement that counts but its predictable continuation. Islamist fighters enshrine their fight against the Russians in Afghanistan. This narrative tells them that U.S. tactical victories in rebel cities like Fallujah thus do not represent defeats—as long as the story means American withdrawal—with insurgents filmed claiming credit. Yet even here the Ghazi elements would still be outsiders, while community Iraqi Islamist fighters would naturally claim the crown of Deliverer.
- *In ascending from subnational to supranational representation.* Thus it is more likely that authentic local insurgencies (i.e., Civil Militia) will claim leadership in their backyards if they are successful. Wilderness Ghazi groups like Al Qaeda have only one path open to them: to aspire to eventual political leadership. They must use their symbolic authority to assert a supranational political authority. As a result, all fighter groups begin locally but then shake off their small town roots. Only by leaving Arabia could Al Qaeda announce a bigger vision. So the wilderness framework not only plays to piety by tracing the steps of Muhammad. It also plays to deep chords of Muslim universalism. Nevertheless, Al Qaeda shows that playing to the world, or even creating a physically international network, does not necessarily lead to Pan-Muslim political authority, and so their franchises tend to express the local identity of the places where they do business. The persistently local aspect of modern Muslim politics has so far frustrated Al Qaeda. It has yet to pioneer a contemporary (as opposed to mythic) model for supranational Muslim political authority. But the symbolic politics of Islam are extraordinarily powerful. Hypothetically, a symbolic defeat of the United States in Iraq might propel Al Qaeda into leadership contention in Arabia. Consequently an Arabian Ghazi group makes the transition from non-state to new-state actor. As a successor state to the Saudis with a successful claim on the holy cities and the mantle of deliverer, such a state might yet aspire to mythical supranational

authority. We should be mindful of the surprising ways in which Muslim non-state actors might become tomorrow's new-state, or even suprastate, actors.³¹ We know the variegated Civil Militia ethos inhabits a very different tradition, developing after the supranational reality of an Ummah-wide Khalifate came apart. Perhaps a popular, broad-based Civil Militia movement would seek the coronet of its own country, but Khalifate and nation-state both are old reference points and poor guides to what has not yet been made.

The ascent of both fighter paradigms begs the question of what they are ascending to, because their very emergence tells us that successor politics in the inner Muslim World are even now barely recognizable. Indeed, even if the fighters are to be its drivers, they will not be its only builders. And as fighting transforms into politics, many of them will be passed by.

It is tempting to say that the underpinnings of future leadership—in authority, in legitimization, in representation—work naturally for Civil Militia. Wilderness Ghazi seem hopelessly crippled by their insistence on a mythic, literary framework for strategy, leadership, and action. Their fantasy of a new Khalifate could be realized only if they somehow create conditions that make them the last, best, and only possible leadership of the Ummah. This development is dreamlike in its possibility, and the Wilderness Ghazi know it. Their only hope for universalistic leadership is ... calamitous U.S. behavior. Thus we must return to the powerful, central role of American actions in realizing Muslim transformation. Here Civil Militia movements already active, as well as those yet to be mustered, rely just as much on us as Ghazi to continue to be their bringer of change.

Can We Embrace One Enemy and Destroy the Other?

The United States made "nation-building" in Iraq all about the benchmarks of electoral government. Creating relationships with new political formation that has organically emerged in the wake of (and before) the American invasion was the last thing on our mind. Our best relationships now are with Kurdish Civil Militia, but these relationships have also served to solidify inimical Sunni fighting groups, as we can see today in Mosul and Karbala.³²

³¹As the insurgency spreads there is the possibility that the line between Wilderness Ghazi and Civil Militia will begin to blur. Michael Doran (Princeton University) describes towns in Saudi Arabia that are virtually independent, cleric-run Salafist strongholds. Does this prefigure Ghazi Civil Militia in the heart of Arabia? If so this might show the way to future Ghazi leadership.

³²Thanassis Cambanis, "In Mosul, Kurdish militia helps keep order," *Boston Globe*, November 18, 2004, http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2004/11/18/in_mosul_kurdish_militia_helps_keep_order/. U.S. relationships with Muslim fighter groups are nothing new, but are dramatically misunderstood. To policy makers,

If Iraq is an incubator for new Muslim political formation, it is also an opportunity for the United States to explore new relationships with successor leadership in the Arab-Muslim World. Here are some very rough thoughts on how Americans might pursue such a course.

1. Rework our "what is acceptable" political paradigm to embrace authentic, locally rooted Civil Militia, including both tribal elder hierarchies and clerical leadership in Iraq. We need to assess the participation of Civil Militia in political formation, and the critical, if transitory, role that fighter identity plays in future political development and associated institutions.
2. Rethink lopsided relationships among fighting groups, and especially the heavy reliance on old standby U.S. client Civil Militia relationships, e.g., Kurdish Peshmerga groups. What is significant about these imperial patron-client relationships is how they skew American thinking toward dominant-subordinate partnerships. This is a poor template for future U.S.-Muslim relationships.
3. Work on developing long-term relationships with *actively insurgent* Civil Militias. We should not concentrate our energies simply on older authority, e.g., Sistani's circle or SCIRI's Badr Brigades. Suggesting that we might promote new things would represent an American leap of faith: to accept Islamist political formation on its own terms.
4. Identify emerging Civil Militia movements in the Arabian states. How will Iraqi political formation—and the narrative of its realization—boost fraternal movements in Arabia? More critically, what will Arabian Ghazi fighters now in Iraq do when they return home?
5. Form new U.S.-inclined Civil Militia alliances and thus be seen as a midwife of civic Islamist association (even as it assumes military form) rather than its enemy. This has been pursued hesitantly and haphazardly in Iraq. It should be a central and acknowledged part of U.S. policy toward the Muslim World.
6. Hunt down and kill Wilderness Ghazi formations in *Arabia Deserta*. Implement an enterprise model for Wilderness Ghazi pursuit. Thus there is still a combat dimension to alternative U.S. policy in the Muslim World. We should not abandon our right to go after those who go after us. We should implement a "stealth" capability to put "hunter-killer" groups on the ground anywhere we choose, far above what we can do today.³³

these groups are non-state actors to be used like minor clients in a larger, more imperial game of great state relations. They certainly have not been approached as though they were agents of regional political and cultural change—let alone the beginnings of new successor state politics!

³³Robert Kaplan argues for as much in "Supremacy by Stealth," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July/August 2003, and in his recent speeches to military audiences. In a recent conversation, he insists that he still supports the original concept of

7. Support latent Civil Militia movements in Syria. U.S. invasion is not the only path to regime change there. Because Islamists in Syria were so cruelly put down by the elder Assad, encouraging their renewal posits an alternative to Ba'ath Party rule. Likewise, putting American authority behind Islamist Civil Militia potential in Egypt could drive real political reform there. Thus rather than simply treating these states as immovable regimes—as we have done for so long across the Muslim World—we should approach the change-agents in society.
8. Accept *rough-edged* Civil Militia outside of Iraq—in Palestine and elsewhere—as authentic political formation *in prospect* and find a way to develop relationships in general with rough-edged Civil Militia across the Muslim World. The failure of Palestinian nationalism (as a unified movement) suggests that Civil Militia relationships are already the imperative there.
9. Track more seriously how the political authority of the change-Ulama is evolving. Here, the day-to-day work of the Ulama and their connection to Civil Militia movements across both Sunni and Shi'a Islam need to be better understood. New Islamist groups that are actively developing Civil Militia wings must be successfully co-opted as they become active participants in political change.
10. Develop a mediative template—*an actual policy!*—for U.S. relations with Civil Militia movements and the indigenous political formation that they come to represent. “Mediation” in this sense means an arms-length relationship: it suggests a quiet U.S. touch, rather than forcing ourselves on Muslims as their Redeemer. We “mediate” because we know “it is not about us,” but about them. Mediation is the best way America can support positive change in the Muslim World.

Can America Control Change?

It is undeniable: America can make change happen. But can we control it? U.S. policy has always been based on the belief that we can control change in *both* senses of *control*: We can manage the change we initiate, and we can leash change we do not approve. This belief has fallen repeatedly in the face of policy failure, but remarkably always rises again. And yet again, Iraq has shown us that we cannot control change.

Here it is worth restating what we have done and thus why we have lost control. So far,

converting the world of Islam to an American form of secular civil society, but his emphasis has shifted to Bismarck's “art of the possible”—more practical operational approaches to defeat an immediate Wilderness Ghazi enemy.

- The United States has militarized political change in Islam, which has been recodified in the heroic carapace of Wilderness Ghazi and Civil Militia.
- We have created popular expectations of realization—Muslim Restoration—through our dramaturgy of climactic armed conflict.
- As the legitimating enemy, the United States has become the essential framer of the Muslim historical narrative to be, and our authority gives it mythic power.

But there is more. Not only did we nurture two enemies, we have helped to nurture the tyrannies they fight. We should never forget this.

American policy makers might take some satisfaction in knowing that our handsome subsidies and security support propped up tottering tyrants for so long. We bought them another 20 or 25 years of repressive authority. Had they used that opportunity well, their situations today might be far more robust. In the Saudi case they used a truly singular opportunity poorly, squandering a providential oil windfall while squirreling away more than a trillion toward their own pleasures and personal accounts. Their day will come. No kinder judgement awaits Egyptian generals or Hashemite lords. Nor should it.

At some point the United States must back off from these degraded enterprises. That we have not done so to date—pumping them with taxpayer billions each year—is now at the heart of the insurgents' brief against us. However deviant we paint the Islamists' interpretation of Islam, they are full on the mark here. We must recognize the price we have paid by buying dictators in exchange for a fragile status quo.

And yet losing the status quo forever surely also represents the lifting of a historical burden on America. Thus there is something positive in losing control. We are still the driver of change, and so we can still hope to influence change, even as the illusion of control is lost.

Except that this is not how American policy makers think. They originally sought total management of big change. What they do not understand is that what makes change so unpredictable is *how America actually relates to the inner Muslim World*. If we are just beginning to see how this relationship historically has promoted change, how can we see where the relationship might take us? We see only two paths. U.S. leadership believes there is only one choice: promote change or try to buy time.

“Ramming Speed”

In 2001 American leadership decided to push maximum change. If we continue on this path, we can describe what another decade of U.S.-encouraged big change might look like.

- *Confrontation with Iran.* Iran has always been central to Washington's change-vision: radical change within a traditional face-off of nation against nation. Claiming Iran as an adversary reshapes a "war on terrorism" into a war of states. Many Americans would find this a strangely satisfying development; however, such a confrontation—even if it did not escalate into all-out war—would usher us formally, if symbolically, to that awaited "clash of civilizations." Such a grand narrative would also ironically crown a state champion for Muslim Restoration. The Sunni Jihadist network would have to scramble to adapt to Iranian (though not necessarily Shi'a) ascendancy in the struggle. But even as they chafe under subordinate circumstance, Al Qaeda and others would find a way to join the rallying of Islam under a grand banner. From an operational standpoint, modest confrontation, in which Iran is not invaded, might lead merely to the destabilization of Iraq and Afghanistan. On the other hand, a "full-up" conflict—the true "world war" of neo-conservative promise³⁴—would mobilize all Muslims for apocalyptic confrontation with the United States.
- *A "neo-colonial" Iraq.* Imagine Iraq as an endlessly corrosive "open question." This is a worst-case scenario in which America cannot let go and yet cannot accept what must happen if we do. Iraq thus becomes the sapping-place of American world leadership. A U.S. administration faced with a series of defeat choices cannot simply choose to do nothing. Knowing that there is no path to victory, while equally unprepared to accept the consequences of defeat, means doing something. Like confronting Iran, perhaps? *After all, are not the Iranians responsible for the situation in Iraq? And they have nukes too!* Iranian confrontation not only shifts the focus away from Iraq, it declares that the only solution to Iraq is to be found in Teheran. *We must finish the job!* Growing domestic opposition to Iraq—if it reaches critical mass, an angry majority—forces a choice between American withdrawal (defeat) and strategic "expansion," which will be argued as the only path to "victory." Iranian destabilization of Iraq becomes a rescuing *casus belli*, thus giving a Persian War its own persuasive appeal.
- *Arabian meltdown.* More and more active U.S. engagement ensures eventual crisis in Arabia. Why? Not only has America invaded the heart of Classical Islam. In Muslim eyes it has also pursued the destruction of both Iraq and Iran. The image of a "forever war" that benefits only the unbeliever is an immensely powerful encouragement to Muslims, who see the struggle as a predestined moment in history. Everything is on the line. Thus the Ummah's authentic defenders—the fighting groups—have increasing and irresistible authority. The Saudis and the other Arabian princes, plus Jordan and the rest, represent apostate (*murtad*) regimes, men who have betrayed Islam. As a result, the fragile Arabian scene today dissolves into the chaos that precedes a time of "rightly guided" restoration. Choices narrow for the United States: Occupy oilfields? Or massively enlarge the war to "manage" all of Arabia? Would this not ensure some form of new Khalifate, followed by attacks on the occupied lands and turncoat Gulf client princes?
- *"Outlier" (Egypt/Pakistan) crises.* The danger for the geographic outliers is a regional cascade: U.S. hostilities with Iran lead to a Saudi implosion, which then assumes the character of Islamic transformation. Can Egypt and Pakistan resist being sucked into the grand drama (like 1914 in slow motion)? With what transcendental authority might kings like Musharraf or Mubarak abjure a righteous Muslim calling? And if they fall, coup followed by mobilized Islamic Republic could create powerful Muslim solidarity, but of a character wholly different from that arrayed against Israel in 1967 or 1973. There would be no conventional gambit this time. This time they would all know how to fight Americans. How would we tame a *resistant environment*, many times larger *and more energized* than Iraq, and with a nuclear-endowed Pakistani dimension?
- *Russian/Israeli fateful missteps.* Both Russia and Israel live in the horror of their war. They inhabit an emotionally charged atmosphere where survival itself hangs on their unhesitating will to act. This is not to say that they are wrong in what they do; rather, what they do is charged and driven by a conviction that vengeance brings security. Thus they also inhabit a fighting cosmos in which they must always lash out. Yet their response to terrorpressures in the Caucasus, or the Occupied Territories, or Lebanon indirectly undercuts American management. Especially flamboyant attacks—prompting perhaps dramatically "bad" Russian or Israeli behavior against Muslims (in the form of punitive or even indiscriminate killing)³⁵—might electrify Muslim energies against us. This would be especially true of an Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities. Beyond the collateral damage of any single event, however, we run the risk of having our war seamlessly morphed into the forever wars of

³⁴Eliot Cohen was the first to re-enunciate this mythic American banner in November 2001, <http://www.opinionjournal.com/editorial/feature.html?id=95001493>. It is currently held aloft by James Woolsey, http://www.afa.org/media/scripts/Woolsey_conf.asp, and Norman Podhoretz, <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/podhoretz.htm>.

³⁵Russian counterinsurgency behavior in Chechnya has been massively more lethal than Israeli counterstrikes and punitive remonstrations in Palestinian areas. Yet Muslims view both through the same unyielding filter—as equivalent atrocity.

our Russian and Israeli associates. Even though we fight for different causes and seek different ends, the United States risks having its efforts indissolubly fused with two desperate friends into a larger, malignant "world war" between the Muslim World and what might be called a short "Coalition of the Vengeful": the United States, Russia, and Israel.

Even if we push change, however dispiriting its implications, change will never reveal its full potential in advance. Instead, as we should see in Iraq, aggressive pursuit of Muslim transformation on our terms only encourages a cascade of change that we can deny moment by moment until it is undeniable. Remember, we went in believing that we owned the cascade. In the spring of 2003 we told ourselves that we would indeed unleash it, but also that we could control it.

"Cuffing" Change

We do, however, have a fallback course: leash the forces of change. This is a strategy that Americans, especially the Cold War age-cohorts, might find familiar, perhaps even comforting. But be not deceived; the Muslim change suggests only deceptive familiarity and offers no long-term comfort.

Whatever it says, this administration has acknowledged the failure of its strategy of grand success in Iraq by very quietly re-creating the spirit of a discarded status quo strategy. Surely American strategists know this can be only superficially restored. Change can be postponed but not overturned. Furthermore, postponing big change in the "Middle East" means directly supporting the work of repressive regimes. *Postponing change in the region has always been achieved through repression*, only now the regimes we cannot afford to let fall are increasingly unable to keep the lid on by themselves. Thus American strategy after Iraq—to realize a goal of minimum change in the next decade—must orchestrate the suppression of change.³⁶

The idea of arresting change seems superficially the opposite of its aggressive promotion, yet believing that we can actually arrest change is a snare and a delusion. The United States does not have the luxury of choosing between big change and a reassembled status quo. Even the most repressive efforts to leash unwanted change buy only its deferral. It is all about "buying time." If there is no better alternative, buying time is worthwhile, but it is worthwhile only if change postponed might mean improvement. This

³⁶In the first wake of 9-11 many called for urgent reform of the Arab tyrannies we support. But the wave of attacks on the Saudi regime in 2003—after our invasion of Iraq—brought the administration up short. Saudi survival is ultimately more important than Saudi reform.

contention works by arguing that downsides might still become upsides worth pursuing.

- *No confrontation with Iran.* If the United States is not pushing confrontation, then the Persian Ulama have no emergency claim on the Iranian people, who are free to resume their agitation for political reform. Thus the prospect of Iranian reform, or even of democratic revolution, at the very least depends on the absence of confrontation. Even absent direct confrontation, however, America's continuing involvement in the region also helps to legitimate the clerics' hold. A more distant America is the best encouragement to democratic revolution in Iran. But there is no distance in this status quo.
- *A stable yet not independent Iraq.* A status quo Arab World needs a status quo Iraq. Though the masterminds of the Iraq invasion imagined a fully independent model democracy, this can no longer be the goal. A hard-charging, free, and unfettered Iraq could put as much pressure on Arabia as a radical Islamist Republic. So American policy makers might return to the model of a pliable, dependent regime that radiates the calming "integrity" of a unified state. This would of necessity still be a "challenged" state, and hence still in need of direct U.S. "support." This Iraq would still give us strategic leverage in the region but would not disturb its old lifestyle too much. Thus buying time returns quietly to "do not disturb" for the Arab *ancien régime*, while simultaneously preserving an upfront U.S. position on both the eastern and western frontiers of Iran. Recent comments by Egypt's foreign minister underscore widespread Arab Establishment fear that coming apart in Iraq means the beginning of a wider Arab unravelling.³⁷
- *Successful Arabian "management."* This means we help the princes better repress their own people. We open the throttle to prop up the House of Saud without advertising what we are really doing. Thus regular Americans will not see how we have intervened to rescue tottering dictatorship. But even a polite word like "rescue" cannot disguise how we keep a tired monarchy afloat. Hopefully U.S. "management" is limited to technical intervention such as security and intelligence support to manage tyranny. Our hands are thus technically "clean." Can we keep them afloat in the face of their own suspicion? Theirs is a closed circle, and they will have to let us in if we are to truly help them survive. Is it not more likely that they will just keep on limiting American

³⁷Thus Egypt's *ancien régime* wants U.S. occupation to continue in Iraq. Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit told a recent conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, "If the foreign forces pull out early from Iraq, I expect that there will be a civil war. Every party will be shooting at everybody else to capture power." http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=10000087&sid=a.gm3AQ.uv2g&refer=top_world_news.

access, courting crisis, rather than submit to full U.S. management? We know as well as anyone that well-conceived, well-applied, and unyielding repression simply works.³⁸ We also know, or should at least recall from our debacle with the Shah, that repression is never forever. And it is as corrosive as it is successful. This is the waiting future for which U.S. forces must make ready.

- *Heavy security support to the "outliers."* How can the United States do anything more to prop up Egypt and Pakistan? More billions in "aid"? Still more "security assistance"? Pressures on both regimes will only grow the longer they cling to power. Yet we cannot truly encourage change, because real regime change—for either Mu-sharraf or the Mubarak dynasty—equals constitutional crisis. So in a minimum change-mode we talk loudly and long about future reform while doing everything possible to undercut it, because nixing reform is the only practical way to keep them in power. This is the paradox for the long term: the more successful are our efforts to keep tyrants in power, the more America is indissolubly identified as the enemy of change.
- *Close coordination with Russia/Israel.* The Israeli and Russian "vengeance" paradigm is a lurking danger for America. A vengeance national security framework is highly susceptible to harsh swings in national emotion. U.S. regional management strategy must avoid such a course if at all possible. But because Israel and Russia are sworn associates of America in the "Global War on Terrorism," their emotionally driven strategic responses to attack could put the entire U.S. position in the region at risk. A strategy of buying time thus must be predicated on being able to "talk down" Israeli and Russian crisis response to local attacks before they threaten to bring down the entire fragile American tracery of stability. Yet this is a skill in short supply.

The big downside of going back and buying time after introducing (even trumpeting!) big change is its unmistakable confession of weakness. Returning to the defensive rejects the chosen course in this war. This would be an admission of strategic failure, suggesting that the best Americans might achieve in the Arab World would be a postponement of defeat. Moreover, because repression is the tool of buying time, the more successful the postponement, the greater is the repression that must be applied. America's indirect repression of Muslim societies through direct support of tyrannies in the region has damaged both our reputation and our position in the Muslim World. The increased repression required to preserve our position

would not necessarily end Muslim insurgency: it could become insurgency's greatest encouragement.³⁹

Thus the certain paradox for U.S. strategy is this: American action pushing change creates the biggest leadership opportunity for Islamist insurgents, while American action to forestall change only legitimates the insurgent cause, building a universal Muslim expectation of future deliverance.

A Third Way?

The puzzle of this war is, in part, confusion over the many Muslim realities that beset us, yet it is also the product of ignorance—not simply of those alien realities but of how we are connected to them.

This is not a war. There is violence and armed conflict aplenty, beginning with the 19 who attacked us on 9-11 and continuing today in Iraq and elsewhere. But both the celebrated "Global War on Terrorism" and the "War in Iraq" are American confections.

This is not a war but rather a relationship. It is on a grand stage to be sure; however, it is both less than, and yet so much bigger than, war. The truth is that the United States finds itself intimately and inextricably enmeshed in the world of Islam. It has helped to make what that world is today, and it has also set in train the ultimate unravelling of what it made.

Americans must come to terms with the situation as a relationship rather than as a war because satisfactory or realistic goals cannot be framed through the language of war. Simply nothing is to be won through a war construct. War narratives impose a ruthless and ironclad logic of black and white, victory or defeat—and also require an enemy that will fit the narrative and play by its rules. War is a demanding paradigm.

By demanding a satisfying war narrative, America has literally set about creating enemies to fight. In this it has been successful. If it is war we want, then we should continue down this path.

Yet if instead of war we see a violent and difficult relationship, then we might choose a different path. My argument is that having ushered in big change across the inner Muslim World, we must find ways to deal with what we have done. One would be to support Islamist movements that we can live with and attack only those that we cannot. Another would be to broaden the notion of what we can live with.

³⁸A point underscored eloquently by Martin Sieff, "Learning from the Saudis," UPI, January 4, 2005, carried in the *Washington Times*, <http://www.washtimes.com/upi-breaking/20050104-115536-1319r.htm>.

³⁹Brian Bender at the *Boston Globe* interviewed a number of Iraq "hawks" and discovered that many are advocating early U.S. withdrawal, for precisely this reason! http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2004/11/22/hawks_push_deep_cuts_in_forces_in_iraq/.

My thesis is that Civil Militia–based new Muslim “entities” are rooted in normative Islamic traditions, and would treat with the West in ways that we can both understand and deal with effectively. Thus we would have the opportunity to develop normal diplomatic relationships, much as the Medieval and Early Modern West had with a diverse range of Muslim states.⁴⁰ Wilderness Ghazi entities, should they arise at last, would be an infinitely more unpalatable proposition.

The great irony is that a war paradigm—however carefully crafted for the American domestic audience—leads to larger war with the Muslim World. It is moreover the

dream narrative of the Wilderness Ghazi, and it is their only possible path to leadership within the Ummah. Thus any war narrative, especially the Great War narrative, becomes a dangerous snare for us, leading potentially to the very ruin of our hopes.

Therefore, aggressive engagement by the United States in the inner Muslim World should be avoided. Wilderness Ghazi should be quietly, stealthily targeted. As for the big change we have helped to make, we should stand back and let it happen, encouraging Civil Militia movements and their guiding tradition as the new basis for Muslim politics.

⁴⁰Daniel Goffman’s creative synthesis, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, 2002, 233, unexpectedly overturns a persistent historical stereotype: “[B]etween the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Ottoman Empire existed briefly as a full and active member of a concert of European states. By the mid seventeenth century, this Islamic state was no longer feared (although a few admired its social and religious variety). Instead it was regarded as one among many polities.” The Ottomans began as Ghazi and became European, a reminder that we should not assume Muslim political evolution—unmanaged by us!—to move of its own toward the aberrant.

Where We Stand and Where We Are Going

- Fighter groups fight because their world gives them the authority to do so. They may be self-organized, but they exist because of cultural mandate. Thus we should not approach Muslim fighter groups from our own framework as aberrant or deviant, but see them rather as inhabiting a traditional framework of being. Their identity has been shaped through a mythic interplay with society. They are dependent on broader Muslim expectations—and willingness to ratify them. Their aspiration to become new leadership is predicated on Muslim cultural traditions.
- Fighter groups are emerging at a time when established rule in the Middle East has become historically fragile. The old Arab regimes are not sustainable over History’s long term, perhaps even its short term. Beneath the appearance of stability these regimes are cracking, not so unlike the world of European monarchies before 1914. Muslims now await such change. Moreover, the old rulers look like U.S. satraps, sustained in power only by American authority. A fragile order and a rush of change—as in Iraq—offer fighter groups unusual prospects and opportunities.
- The United States now represents the bringer of change in the region. U.S. intervention has legitimated change and created powerful expectations among Muslims. We have foreclosed our former strategy of underwriting the status quo. What’s more, the very pressures for change we have created encourage an aggressive U.S. pursuit of change. This in turn also encourages cooperative relationships among Muslim fighter groups. So the narrative’s prospect of imminent big change gives it yet more authority.
- The region is now so culturally networked that events in one place impact the region as a whole. Accordingly, quietist Muslim identity has been distorted by the change-dynamic, and Muslims now feel like participants in a larger struggle. Insurgent movements intensify a sense of collective effort and mirror it by being operationally networked across the region. If insurgents undercut the legitimacy of one old regime, the erosion will be felt everywhere.
- Arabia is the recipient of culturally networked change, so that conflict—whether in Iraq or Iran—puts irresistible pressure on Saudi and other princely regimes. Furthermore, it is how continuing conflict cross-pollinates rather than any particular tactical outcome in Iraq that becomes the eventual “destabilizer.”

- U.S. failure to manage regional change after the invasion of Iraq urgently narrows U.S. choices to preserve old establishments in Arabia. Continuing to encourage big change, as America did in 2003, risks unravelling our position in the Middle East. Repressing change, however, means vainly pursuing the former status quo.
- The United States still has a choice: promoting change or buying time during the next decade. Pressures to keep pushing change, like confronting Iran or Syria or sticking to our guns in Iraq, will be difficult to avoid and yet promise unpredictable and even explosive consequences. In contrast, withdrawal to the status quo past might become real strategic retreat as well, electrifying the cause and whetting enemy expectations of victory. Neither path relieves pressure on Arab regimes, but only adds to it. Whatever strategy we pursue leads to eventual Arab regime breakdown.
- As change crystallizes, so will the competition over who will take it to the moment of realization. There are two competing models of Islamist fighter groups. The familiar "terror network" might be better characterized as a Wilderness Ghazi tradition. They build creatively on myths of Islamic origination and represent a purifying journey through the wilderness as a fighting fraternity that sweeps down metaphorically to restore the Ummah—but as triumphant outsiders. In contrast, Islamist Civil Militia represent another, *historical* Muslim tradition in which local defenders rise to overthrow tyrants, defend a society oppressed, and bring Islam back to its "rightly guided" path.
- Between them lies opportunity. Immediate opportunities exist in Iraq for Civil Militia groups to become national leaders, either of Iraq as a whole or as a collection of smaller successor principalities. Shi'a groups might realize an Islamist Republic in the former Iraq. In contrast, immediate opportunity for Wilderness Ghazi exists only in the chaos succeeding U.S.–Iranian hostilities—or a premature U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. Yet breakdown in Arabia would give Ghazi groups like Al Qaeda a chance to compete for actual political leadership.
- Thus the threat of Muslim fighter groups is not their immediate capability to harm. It is rather their ability, in an increasingly unmanageable environment, to transform from narrow fighters to political leaders within a more local context (Civil Militia) or a successor meta-state context (Wilderness Ghazi).

This is where we stand today. Here, hypothesis must properly end. The rest is up to us.

This paper is a product of the Strategic Assessments Office, National Security Analysis Department, of The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory. Its contents and ideas are intended to stimulate, even provoke serious thinking; not everyone will agree with them. Therefore it should be noted that the paper reflects the views of the author alone and does not necessarily imply concurrence by JHU/APL or any other organization or agency, public or private.