American Policy Institutions and Islam: The Case of RAND and Brookings

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Abstract

The present article is a constructivist framing analysis of the RAND and Brookings production of expertise on U.S. policy toward Islam. While the duality of moderation vs. radicalism is present in the narrative of both think tanks, their divergent construction of the meaning of these concepts results in the creation of two distinct frames. For RAND, the U.S. government needs to take side in the war of ideas "within Islam," actively engaging in "religion-building" by promoting the creation of localized moderate, modernist forms of Islam and building networks of moderate Muslims. A Cold-War-driven modernization mentality is at the heart of such understanding of U.S. relations with Islam and the Islamic world. For Brookings, though, a more pragmatic construction of Muslim politics renders the "Islamist dilemma" obsolete and necessitates U.S. government engagement with moderate Islamists. Brookings advises the U.S. government to forego efforts at converting Islamists into post-Islamists or liberal Islamists and rather opt for efforts to engage those Islamists who are found to be committed to the democratic process and to reject a resort to violence. Despite their differences, what binds the framing of RAND and Brookings together is their rejection of the political Islam that threatens the hegemony of the United States and Israel in the region, i.e. that of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its affiliate resistance Islamic groups.

Keywords: American policy, Islam, RAND, Brookings, Muslim.

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Introduction

Over the last several decades, debates about the reemergence of Islam to the political scene have increasingly become part of the fabric of U.S. foreign policy considerations. Major American think tanks, including the RAND Corporation and the Brookings Institution which are the subject of the current study, have devoted a considerable part of their resources to monitoring issues and events related to Islam in international affairs and making recommendations to politicians in this regard (Bokhari 2002; do Céu Pinto 1999; Sayyid 2004). While the main trigger for this intensive attention was the emergence and victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the end of the Cold War, the events of 9/11, recent uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, and the rise of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) have intensified the interest in and the production of such expertise (Bokhari 2002; Bosco 2014).

Using constructivism as the theoretical framework and framing analysis as methodology, the present article investigates how these two influential American think tanks, from here on simply called RAND and Brookings, have constructed the meaning of Islam and Islamism in the context of U.S. relations with the Muslim world. Based on previous studies, "the United States has adopted a more-or-less antagonistic policy toward the rise of political Islam since the last days of the Carter administration" (Bokhari 2002, 14). Today, though, there seems to be a shift occurring on the discursive plane about the best course of action toward Islam in the region. Competing prescriptions for engagement call for such action on the

ideological or policy levels. RAND and Brookings' framing of the best course of action in dealing with Islam and Islamism represent two distinct approaches to the issue. Based on an analysis of manuscripts available on the two organizations' web sites, the present study aims to shed light on their views on the main assumptions, concepts, and policy recommendations in this regard.

With the demise of the Soviet Union, American academic, think tank, and government circles began asking for increased attention and engagement with religion, in general, and Islam in particular (Johnston and Sampson 1994, 8; Farr 2008; Johnston 2011). This was mostly premised on the importance of such engagement for United States' national security. The victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran and the subsequent endurance of the Islamic Republic had given renewed energy and focus to the resurgence of Islam elsewhere in the Muslim world. Nevertheless, during the Cold War, statecraft was mostly carried out within secular international theory perspectives such as realism and neo-realism and religious aspects had been mostly overlooked (Sayyid 2003). Despite this lack of prudence, if looked deeply, one could detect all around the Muslim world in the 1980s and the 1990s a "longing for an indigenous form of religious politics free from the taint of Western culture" (Juergensmeyer 1993, i). Muslim activists everywhere began to "view religion as a hopeful alternative, a base for criticism and change" (2). In the last years of the Cold War, though, the U.S. government actively supported the brand of political Islam that opposed the Islamic Revolution of Iran and in reality instigated the growth of terrorism in the Middle East.

While religion seemed to be "the missing dimension" (Johnston and Sampson 1994) of statecraft in the period between the end of the Cold War and 9/11, it became one staple of foreign policy circles especially when dealing with the Muslim world after 9/11. According to Bosco (2014), after 9/11, "the State Department, the Department of Defense, the National Security Council, the CIA, USAID, the National Defense University, the Naval War College, and a number

of well-known think tanks explored a range of ways to understand, engage, and influence Muslim populations and the development of Islam in the name of national and international security" (93).

I- Conceptual Framework:

The above-mentioned change in the U.S. government's approach to religion was coupled with changes in the study of international relations. The end of the Cold War and the inability of traditional rationalist international relations theories, most notably realism, to explain let alone predict the vast reconfigurations in world politics opened up new spaces for non-rationalist theories such as constructivism to examine international politics. With the emergence of constructivism as an accepted alternative theory, new theoretical grounds were opened for the examination of the role of non-state agency (such as that of think tanks) in creating, changing, or sustaining normative and ideational structures that are instrumental in shaping the identities and interests of states (Reus-Smit 2005). Constructivist theory suggests that the ways in which political actors understand the world around them is "a critically important variable in understanding the policies they pursue" (Schonberg 2007, 6). It is argued here that a constructivist perspective that gives credence to the role of ideology and identity in shaping of policy is necessary for a full understanding of the processes that shape the American response to Islam and Islamism and how that process shapes and is shaped by a construction of identities and interests.

At the ontological level, constructivism is based on three basic assumptions. First, "normative or ideational structures" are seen to be as important as material structures and to have a powerful effect on social and political action (Reus-Smit 2005, 197). These structures include socially constituted values, beliefs, and ideas that shape the identities of political actors. Wendt, for example, argues that "material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded"

(Wendt 1995, 73). Secondly, these socially constructed identities in turn shape the conceptualization of interests and political actions. This assumption is in conflict with the neo-realist and neo-liberal assumption that interests are exogenously determined, which in turn limits the conceptualization of society to a strategic domain for the pursuit of preexisting interests. For constructivists, instead, society is where identities and interests are formed. The third constructivist assumption is the interdependence and mutually constituted nature of structures and agents (Reus-Smit 2005, 197). Constructivism brings the study of think tank influence to a new playing field paying attention to both the constraints that material and symbolic structures of power exert on think tank agency and the ways think tanks affect these structures through the production of knowledge and ideas. The emphasis on the significance of normative and ideational structures affecting international relations adds to the importance of think tanks' work in politics. Adler (1992) emphasizes the importance of examining the role of national epistemic communities (which include think tanks) in this regard. Adler and Haas postulate that epistemic communities play an instrumental role in the first two steps of what they call "policy evolution," namely "policy innovation" and "policy diffusion." The next two steps of the policy process are "selection" and "persistence" (Adler and Haas 1992, 373). The first step in the policy evolution process, namely policy innovation, is of particular interest to the present study. According to Adler and Haas, exerting influence on policy innovation involves three processes: "(1) framing the range of political controversy surrounding an issue, (2) defining state interests, and (3) setting standards" (375). In other words, the identification of national interests is a derivative of how issues are framed.

The concept of framing has been used in other disciplines as well, including policy studies (Payne 2001; Schon and Rein 1995), sociology (Benford and Snow 2000; Goffman 1974), and media studies (Entman 1993, 2004). Using framing analysis, constructivists

aim to examine the production of meaning as a means of influence. Klotz and Cecelia (2007) use the sociological term "frame" "to denote a template that identifies a problem and offers a solution (within the context of broader theoretical and ideological assumptions" (52-53). A substantial amount of work on epistemic communities from a constructivist viewpoint has used the concept of framing to trace discourses of knowledge in areas such as the environment, human rights, security, and economic governance, and the impact of these research activities on policies (Klotz and Lynch 2007).

The time-frame for the current study is 2001 to 2015. All manuscripts, including reports and articles, that directly dealt with a foreign policy issue, effect, or condition in relation to Islam that appeared on the two think tank's web sites were studied. Frame analysis as a constructivist methodology first gained currency and was employed extensively as means of going beyond the materialist and rationalist assumptions prevalent in studies of social movements. The method is used to "disentangle the complex relationship between actors, goals, and behavior by concentrating on the production of meaning as a type of influence" (Klotz and Lynch 2007, 52). Gitlin defines frames as "principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters" (Gitlin 2003, 6). As Entman says, "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman 1993, 22).

Through their selection practices, the government, other elites, and the media attempt to influence our perception of the most meaningful depiction of reality, what is termed salience. Entman suggests that framing is meant to perform all or some of four functions: "defining problematic effects/conditions, identifying causes/agents, endorsing remedy, and conveying moral judgment"

(Entman 2004, 24). Taking Entman's conceptualization of framing, the study asks how RAND and Brookings define foreign policy issues, effects, or conditions in relation to Islam, what causes and agents do they identify for the problem thus defined, what remedies do they endorse, and what moral judgments do they make.

The idea of Islam as a threat to the West in terms of security, national interest, and way of life is as old as the contact between the West and Islamic societies and ideas (Sardar 1999). This conceptualization of Islam is part of an Orientalist framework, which, according to Said (1997), has come to guide American relations with Muslim populations inside and outside the United States. In the last decades of the 20th century, scholars most notably Said (1994) aimed to shatter the myth of an essential (or "an ontological and epistemological") difference between the inferior East and the superior West, one that has provided the life blood of Western self identification and has been used to keep the "Orientals" in a place of subjugation (Sardar 1999).

Sayyid (2003) sees Islamism as an articulation of opposition to the hegemonic world order of the United States and other so-called great powers and "the politicization of discontent" with Westernization as a way of life. Islamism can take on the shape of electoral or revolutionary politics. What follows is an account of studies that examined U.S. foreign policy regarding Islamism.

In *America and Political Islam, Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests*, Fawaz A. Gerges (1999) examines U.S. foreign policy toward "Islamism" from the Carter administration to the Clinton administration. He examines the US foreign policy elite's thinking regarding political Islam in terms of a tension between ideology and realpolitik. He uses several terms, namely political Islam, Islamists, Islamic revivalism, Islamism, and Islamic activism, to delineate forces that "contend that Islam possesses a theory of politics and the state and includes prescriptive notions for political and social activism" (1). Gerges finds extreme polarization in the American intellectual scene

about political Islam ranging from "confrontationists" who lump all Islamists together as the new enemy and argue that Islam is inherently anti-Western and antithetical to democracy to "accommodationists" who reject the monolithic portrayal of Islam as anti-Western and anti-democratic and distinguish between "the actions of legitimate Islamist political opposition groups and the tiny extremist minority" (28-29). In a similar book, do Céu Pinto's (1999) appraisal of the American foreign policy elite view of political Islam is very much in line with the confrontationist approach to Islamism. He suggests that this political view is reflected in U.S. policy which is cautious to engage populist Islamist movements because of a fear of the rise of anti-American, anti-Israeli popular governments in such places as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

Earlier studies tackled the different journalistic and academic approaches to the duality between Islam and the West, but stopped at articulating the typologies that exist in the epistemic community dealing with Islam and Islamism. In the present research, the goal is to more closely examine the particular discourses that exist in this regard. Framing analysis in conjunction with constructivism allows the researcher to show how this duality is defined, what problems are identified and what remedies are endorsed. The aim is to tease out the particularities of the different approaches to Islam and Islamism in the United States. RAND and Brookings provide ideal cases in this regard as they are two think tanks that have been at the forefront of foreign policy analysis in the United States for decades.

While, the whole American foreign policy community is engaged with Islamic ideas and actors under the rubric of smart power, US government's engagement with Islam is mostly relegated to the Department of Defense (Bosco 2014, 114). RAND as the most intimately connected think tank with the Pentagon, owing its origin in 1948 to the U.S. Air Force and its subsistence ever since to the U.S. government, is thus one of the places in the think tank world that is concerned with the subject. The think tank shifted its foreign policy

research focus in the post-Cold War era from "Sovietology" to "Islamology" (Samaan 2012). Like the Defense Department, RAND looks at issues related to Islam as an element of war strategy and national security. As "the most important non-state instrument of American Cold War planning" (Medvetz 2007, 94), RAND has aimed in recent years to apply its extensive body of Cold War expertise to the subject of U.S. relations with Islam and Islamism. RAND receives the bulk of its funding from the U.S. government. In 2014, for example, RAND operated on a budget of $269.7 million, more than 72 percent of which was provided by the U.S. government (*RAND at a glance* 2014).

Foreign policy has also been one of the main research focuses of Brookings since its establishment in 1927. Following the September 11, 2001, attacks and the subsequent War on Terrorism, Brookings concentrated a significant portion of its assets to the analysis of foreign policy as it relates to the Middle East. Brookings' Saban Center for Middle East Policy, now renamed simply as the Center for Middle East Policy, was founded in 2002 with the aim of producing research and analysis about issues of concern to U.S. policy in the region. One of the main goals of the Center was the promotion of the so-called peace process furthering the aim of a two-state solution to the Israeli problem. Brookings' Center for Middle East Policy is close to the Israel lobby (Mearsheimer and Walt 2007). It was created through a $13 million grant from the ardently Zionist billionaire Haim Saban (Sorkin 2004). The Center houses the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, which aims "to engage and inform policymakers, practitioners and the broader public on developments in Muslim countries and communities and on the nature of their relationship with the United States" (About the project). As far as the funding for the Project for U.S. Relations with the Muslim World is considered, the following have been mentioned as financial supporters of the project: the Ford Foundation, the Education and Economic Outreach Foundation, the Government of Qatar, the

United States Institute of Peace, Haim Saban, and the Brookings Institution (Singer 2002, 1).

II- Analysis

RAND and Brookings have both been active in producing expertise about United States' policy toward Islam and Islamic groups and movements. According to RAND's website, "virtually every one of its research units" engage in works on the Middle East, mainly to "fully understand questions of stability" in the region and to study national security issues. In particular, RAND's Center for Middle East Public Policy (CMEPP) does much of the coordinating work for research in this regard. RAND's work on Islam is perhaps most suited to the following two research areas: "the promotion of democracy in a way that advances, rather than undermines, stability" and "the war on terrorism, along with the diminution of extremism and radicalism" (RAND and Middle East policy analysis). RAND's work on Islam is mainly presented in the form of book-length reports and congressional testimonies. Thus, while the number of products may be small, each is extensive in its scope.

Brookings' work on Islam is done as part of its Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, its blog Markaz Middle East Politics & Policy (Markaz), the annual U.S.-Islamic World Forum (About the U.S.-Islamic World Forum), and the Brookings Doha Center (About us - Brookings Doha Center). These works are housed in Brookings Center for Middle East Policy research. The forum is co-convened annually by the Brookings Project on U.S. relations with the Islamic World and the State of Qatar. It gathers international leaders in government, civil society, academia, business, religion, and media to discuss issues of concern to the United States and Muslim communities around the globe. It began operation in 2004 with the financial assistance of the government of Qatar. Unlike RAND, much of Brookings work on Islam appears in short commentary format. Longer reports, policy papers, and books deal with the subject as well.

Thus, the number of Brookings products are larger compared to those of RAND.

With framing analysis as the main analytical tool and constructivism as the conceptual framework, in the following section, the works of the two think tanks are examined in relation to their main assumptions regarding Islam and the Islamic world; the key concepts and processes discussed; and the main policy recommendations advised. Later, the overall framing of the two organizations will be discussed.

In approaching U.S. policy toward Islam and the Islamic world, RAND and Brookings advocate two distinct views. The former takes an ideological, while the latter takes a policy-oriented, pragmatic approach. For RAND, democratization is impossible without modernization, which is defined in terms of Western values. Thus, for the Muslim world to become democratic, RAND suggests that it has to move beyond the commitment to Islamic law as the building block of social and political order. Such a requirement is a first step toward aligning Islam with modernity and a required transitional phase toward liberal democracy. As a result, a main assumption in RAND expert policy analyses is the incompatibility of Islam conceived as the primary source of law and order (often termed Islamic fundamentalism otherwise known as Islamism and political Islam) with democracy defined in terms of liberal values. All Islamist groups are thus labeled as fundamentalists because of their adherence to Islam as the highest criteria for politics. Thus, reforming the religion of Islam is found to be a necessary first step to democracy in the region (Benard 2003; Rabasa 2005; Rabasa et al. 2007; Rabasa 2004; Rabasa et al. 2004; Rabasa et al. 2010). Only those elements within the Muslim polity who are committed to reforming Islam are found to be reliable partners for the United States. Thus, RAND's approach to Islam is best characterized as "religion-building" (Benard 2003, 3) based on modernization theory. The struggle is often analogized to the Cold War struggle with Communism (Rabasa et al.

2007).

For Brookings, on the contrary, democratization is defined in terms of a process rather than a project. As a result, mimicking Western values and form of democracy is not seen as required for genuine democracy to take root. With this frame of reference, "illiberal democracy" and "Islamic democracy" are possible scenarios (Hamid 2014). As long as Islamist parties are committed to the democratic process, which it is argued that they have shown to be so (Lynch 2008), they are deemed acceptable political actors for engagement. Basing his argument on an analysis of Muslim Brotherhood policy documents, platforms, and reform documents, Lynch believes that such moderate Islamists embrace many of the concepts of political democracy, including a commitment to electoral participation even at heavy costs. Thus, on both discourse and practice levels, he believes that moderate Islamist groups such as the Brotherhood have done all they could to show strong commitment to democracy. Nevertheless, their conceptualization of democracy is not commensurate with liberalism. Rather, it is built upon a strongly conservative understanding of reform (Lynch 2008).

With this definition of democracy, America's "Islamist dilemma," i.e. the widespread, long-held belief among American foreign policy elites that the promotion of democracy in the Middle East is likely to result in the rise of Islamists to power which would eventually end the democratic process, is found to be fallacious and the main flaw in U.S government considerations in opting to side with Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes.

> The United States and its European allies have been paralyzed by what some analysts call the "Islamist dilemma": Western nations, particularly since the end of the Cold War, have had a stated moral and strategic interest in supporting democracy abroad. In Eastern Europe and Latin America, this has been reflected in discrete policy initiatives, many of them relatively successful. Yet the Middle East remains "exceptional." Democratic openings are feared for what they may bring:

namely Islamist groups perceived to be anti-American and anti-Israel. (Hamid and Kadlec 2010, 7)

On some occasions, Brookings scholars suggest that this deep fear of Islamism has foreign policy roots rather than ideological ones. According to Brookings senior fellow Hamid, for example, despite Washington's repeated questioning of the possibility of democracy, pluralism, and women's rights in an Islamist context, what the United States really fears are "the kinds of foreign policies" Islamist parties might pursue. He defines the Islamist groups foreign policy mandate as such: "Unlike the Middle East's pro-Western autocracies, Islamists have a distinctive, albeit vague conception of an Arab world that is confident, independent, and willing to project influence beyond its borders" (Hamid 2011, 40). These objectives often run counter to U.S. interests in the region. It is suggested that through engagement with mainstream Islamists, these hostile foreign policies are manageable. Also, democratization is found impossible without overcoming the Islamist dilemma. It is argued that a U.S. policy of apprehension toward Islamist movements and groups proves counterproductive given the popularity of Islamism in the Middle East.

With the different assumptions discussed above, RAND and Brookings construct the notions of moderate and radical Islam differently. Angel Rabasa, senior political scientist at RAND, argues in a testimony, for example, that defining radical Islamist groups "in terms of support for terrorism or other forms of violence" is "too narrow a focus" (Rabasa 2005, 1). According to him, the main defining feature of radicalism is not the practice of violence but the ideology that "creates the conditions for violence and that is subversive of the values of democratic societies" (Rabasa 2005). In particular, any call for the establishment of an Islamic political order based on the Islamic rule of law (*Shari'a*) is deemed radical. On the contrary, one of the key features of moderate Islam or modernist Islam is suggested to be the reluctance to accept the religious

authority and authenticity of original sources of Islam, including the Qur'an and *hadith* (traditions of the Prophet) (Benard 2003). Accordingly, Muslims are subdivided into four main ideological categories of which only the latter two are deemed acceptable: fundamentalists, traditionalists, modernists, and secularists.

Contrary to RAND's definition, moderation is defined in terms of the behavior of Islamist groups. Forfeiting militancy is the main defining characteristic of moderate Islamism. With this definition, groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas are deemed unacceptable and their security platforms antithetical to moderation. Another defining characteristic is the groups' acceptance of the democratic process. Alanani defines moderation in the following terms: "the extent to which movements accept peaceful political participation, do not rely on militias, and accept the values of democracy and its various components, such as freedom, tolerance, and equality, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, or gender" (Al-Anani 2010, iii).

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, and Yemen and the Moroccan Justice and Development Party are given as examples of moderate Islamists groups (Al-Anani 2010). Tunisia's Ennahda Party is given as another example (Hamid 2007). Despite the many democratic features of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the country does not receive the same treatment as other Islamist actors. In fact, the Brookings literature on U.S. relations with Islam is often silent on the case of the Islamic Republic. Occasionally, Brookings anti-Iran sentiment becomes apparent (Hamid 2014, 2015). The Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) is one of the main cases of radical Islam to which much of Brookings scholarship is devoted (McCants 2015; Lister 2015).

The threat assessment from Islamist groups, deemed radical by RAND but moderate by Brookings such as the Muslim Brotherhood, are different. To RAND experts, "the challenge that we face in confronting radical Islam is commensurate with the challenge that the United States and the West faced during the Cold War, but perhaps it

is even more complex in its social and ideological components" (Rabasa 2005, 5). Brookings, however, warns of any attempt at making the current U.S. relations with Islam analogous to the Cold War. Brookings senior fellow McCants disputes the accuracy of ideological assumptions regarding the relationship between Islam and terrorism. He argues that Islamic scripture does not cause terrorism, and its reformation would not eliminate terrorism. Even the ISIS does not base all of his actions on Islamic scripture, he says. He argues that capitalizing on reforming Islam to combat terrorism is faulty on pragmatic and logical grounds (McCants 2015).

RAND and Brookings advance their policy analysis with regard to Islam and the Islamic world based on different assumptions regarding the political appeal of Islam in the Muslim world. In the case of RAND, it is simply assumed that the majority of Muslims around the globe adhere to what RAND brands as moderate Islam, an Islam divorced from *shari'ah* and compatible with modernity. No statistical backing or other reference is provided for such an assertion. The success of the so-called Islamist political parties around the Muslim world is simplistically analyzed in terms of a population that has been manipulated by fundamentalist propaganda which has gained its effectiveness through better resources (Rabasa et al. 2007, iii).

Brookings analysts, however, posit that public support in the Arab world for Islamism defined as the belief that Islam and Islamic law should play a prominent role in public policy (Hamid 2011, 30) is high as most people at least do not oppose such an application of religion to the political sphere (Hamid and Kadlec 2010). The general public pro-Islamist attitude is coupled with anti-Americanism, according to Brookings scholars. Based on an extensive body of focus group and polling data gathered in the post-9/11 period in several Muslim-majority countries of the Middle East, Kull makes an important observation, that the problem of anti-Americanism and the resultant terrorism is a systemic one:

> Hostility toward the United States in the broader society plays a critical role in sustaining terrorist groups, even if most disapprove of those groups' tactics. The essential "problem," then, is one of America's relationship with Muslim societies as a whole, or an integrated system (Kull 2011, 8).

The following themes emerged from Kull's polling study as underlying reasons for the "widespread and enduring" anti-American attitudes: 1. "The United States seeks to and largely succeeds in coercively dominating the Muslim world, shaping it in ways that serve its interests irrespective of the wishes of the people and violating the principle of sovereign equality. 2. "The United States is hostile to Islam and seeks to undermine it and to impose a secular social order, betraying the principles of freedom of religion. 3. "Driven by anti-Islamic prejudice and seeking to use Israel as a base for regional domination, the United States supports and enables Israel in its victimization of the Palestinian people and 4. "Contrary to its democratic principles, the United States undermines democracy in the Muslim world so as to preserve its control and to ensure that Islamism is kept under wraps." (Kull 2011, 25)

Kull's data provide evidence that Muslim anger at the United States is mostly rooted in policy-based grievances and is only to a very limited extent explained by civilizational components. Kull believes American policymakers expressed belief in the Islamist dilemma shows that the Muslim perception of American betrayal of their right to self-determination is not baseless (Kull 2011, 104). Table 1 gives a summary of the underlying key assumptions and conceptualizations of RAND and Brookings narratives on U.S. relations with Islam and Islamism as explicated above. These different assumptions make the basis for different policy recommended by RAND and Brookings.

Table 1 Underlying Key Assumptions and Conceptualizations

Brookings	RAND
Democracy defined as a process.	Democracy defined in terms of Western values.
Radicalism and moderation defined in terms of behavior.	Radicalism and moderation defined in terms of ideology.
Democracy need not necessarily be liberal.	Democratization is impossible without modernization.
Moderate/Mainstream Islamists are committed to the democratic process.	Islam as the primary source of law and order is incompatible with democracy.
America's Islamist dilemma is unfounded and faulty.	All Islamists labeled as fundamentalist and unreliable.
Moderate Islamists should be engaged.	Moderate Muslims committed to reforming Islam are the only reliable partners.
Making a Cold War analogy is unfounded.	Struggle with "radical Islam" is analogous to the ideological struggles of the Cold War.
Islamism has wide appeal in Muslim countries.	Majority of Muslims are against Islamism.
U.S. government should not meddle in reforming Islam because it is not the cause of terrorism.	Islam should be reformed and made liberal.

III- Main Strategies, Tactics, and Policy Recommendations

Brookings: Given the strength and appeal of Islamism in Muslim communities, Brookings analysts find the best, safest strategy for achieving American interests in the region to be United States' engagement with mainstream Islamist elements such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in a system of governance that is based on an inclusive democratic process. The gradualism inherent in mainstream Islamist politics is considered safer compared to other abrupt changes that could result from protests to authoritarianism in the region. Note for example the following excerpt:

> "Islamism" has become a bad word, because the Islamists we hear about most often are those of ISIS and al-Qaeda. Most Islamists, however, are not jihadists or extremists; they are members of mainstream Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood whose distinguishing feature is their gradualism (historically eschewing revolution), acceptance of parliamentary politics, and willingness to work within existing state structures, even secular ones. Contrary to popular imagination, Islamists do not necessarily harken back to seventh century Arabia (Hamid 2015).

Hamid (2014) recommends that the U.S. government engage the so-

called "moderate Islamists" but refrain from aiming to reform them into "post-Islamist liberals," a strategy he finds unrealistic and counterproductive at the same time. He is critical of Western pundits' post-Egyptian-coup assessments of the demise of Islamism in the revolutionary countries of the Middle East and North Africa. He, instead, states the following:

> "Islamism" – in its varied manifestations – is deeply entrenched in these societies. There's a reason it has proven quite resilient in the face of forced secularization, brute, unyielding repression, and a generally hostile regional order. For whatever reason … Islam has been somewhat immune to secularization, despite efforts and expectations to the contrary. Of course, support for Islamism doesn't necessarily translate into support for specific Islamist organizations, but the widespread support for Islam and Islamic law playing a more central role in public life will remain (Hamid 2014).

Elsewhere he had also noted that "political Islam is here to stay. … The openings of political space means that Islamists parties will proliferate and that non-Islamist parties, if they want to win, will need to adopt policies and positions that more closely align with the conservative sentiment of voters" (Hamid 2011, 37). Another recommendation is to accept that Islamist politics is socially conservative and that such politics is legitimate and not peculiar to Muslim societies (Lynch 2008).

The durability of Islamism is expressed in a 2011 *Foreign Affairs* article, "Like it or not, the United States will have to learn to live with political Islam" (Hamid 2011). Overall, Brookings scholars advocate strategic engagement with "moderate" Islamists, especially the new generation, with the aim of creating an alignment between their positions and American interests especially on the issue of "peace with Israel" (Hamid 2011). Nuanced understanding of these movements and engagement are the only sure means, according to Alanani (2010), to mitigate the rise of various Salafi groups and movements.

Distinguishing between three levels of engagement, namely "low-level contacts, strategic dialogue, and partnership," Hamid and Kadlec (2010, 12-13)stress the need for the U.S. government to move beyond low-level contacts which are suitable only for information gathering and public diplomacy purposes. To support democracy and secure its interests in the region, the U.S. government is recommended to employ strategic dialogue and partnership. While the former entails communication with Islamist groups and parties to gauge each side's priorities and needs, the latter entails a more interventionist approach encompassing "active political support and funding" (Hamid and Kadlec 2010). In 2010 Hamid and Kadlec find the low-level contacts approach insufficient and the pursuit of formal partnerships impractical. Thus, the strategic dialogue path is found to be a suitable middle ground that has the potential of achieving all of the goals of engaging Islamists, i.e. gathering information, public diplomacy, promoting democracy, and securing American interests in the region.

In the period following the 2011 popular revolutions that swept the Middle East, Brookings experts continued to urge the U.S. government to more seriously act on the issue of engaging Islamist groups in the region. Such a recommendation is made, however, based on purely foreign policy considerations with the aim of putting pressure on Islamist groups to form policies more amenable to U.S. and Israeli interests in the region. Accordingly, the goal is "to guide the new, rapidly evolving Middle East in a favorable direction" (Hamid 2011, 40). Three main policy areas are listed: "advancing the Arab-Israeli peace process, countering Iran, and combating terrorism" (2011). The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's hostility and fear of "a powerful Iranian-Syrian-Hezbollah axis" is cited as an example of an opening for forging policy alignments between the U.S. and Islamist groups in the region (44). Allaying the firmly held antipathy to Israel and U.S. hegemony in the region is found to be harder to achieve especially if the conflict worsens or turns into war. Despite these concerns, Brookings experts find substantial areas of agreement

between Islamists and U.S. interests including on the issue of fighting al-Qaeda, improving economic conditions, and political reform. The U.S. government is encouraged to capitalize on these areas of agreement which may help soften the Islamist positions on foreign policy concerns as well. Ultimately, they argue, "the future of relations between Western nations and the Middle East may be largely determined by the degree to which the former engage nonviolent Islamist parties in a broad dialogue over shared interests and objectives" (Hamid and Kadlec 2010, 1).

Kull believes that "taking a friendlier stance toward moderate Islamists" helps the United States to change the hostile narrative that is driving the course of its relationship with the Muslim world. This is especially the case given the ambivalence present in Muslim feelings toward America. Kull is of the belief that if the United States were to take appropriate measures to lessen the sense of threat from America, the feelings of attraction would come to the surface, creating the grounds for a world where the Muslim world and the United States have "a shared set of norms within which Muslims can feel accepted and safe – and maybe even amicable toward America" (Kull 2011).

Other Brookings fellows believe that America is losing the war of ideas in the Muslim world and is in serious need of revamping its public diplomacy efforts. To institutionalize public diplomacy toward the Muslim world, the following steps are recommended: Creating an "America's Voice Corps" of at least 200 fully fluent Arabic speaking public diplomacy workers and a similar cadre in other major languages of the Muslim world for media appearance (Amr and Singer 2007, 9); Establishing American Centers and library initiatives similar to the Cold War "America Houses" in predominantly Muslim countries to engage the youth on foreign policy issues (9-11); Privatizing Al Hurra television and Radio Sawa and launching "C-SPANs" for the Muslim world to increase their credibility (11-12); Strengthening cultural exchange programs and easing the visa process (12); Engaging Arab and Muslim Americans in public diplomacy

efforts (13); Making all federal agencies engage in public diplomacy (14); And developing military exchange networks and increase the Defense Department's public diplomacy funding (14-15).

While engagement with the general Muslim population is emphasized to win the war of ideas, Brookings fellows warn that governmental promotion of liberal reform in the religion of Islam is counterproductive. Brookings fellow McCants underscores the belief that aiming to reform the religion of Islam, which was earlier recounted as turning Islamists into post-Islamist liberals, is unjustifiable under logical, legal, and pragmatic considerations. Doing otherwise would result in approving the political repression inflicted on Islamists such as was the case in supporting Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as a reformer overlooking his atrocities against the supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. To use McCants' (2015) words, "this is not liberalism; this is intolerance dressed up as liberalism." This, however, does not mean that Brookings scholars do not favor a so-called liberal understanding of Islam. They just see no justification for and no benefit in governmental fostering of such understanding. McCants (2015) says as a parenthetical note, "indeed, few outsiders would complain if the majority of Muslims decided that some of the harsher passages of their Scriptures weren't relevant to modern life." Support for a reformist interpretation of Islam is also evident in Mehrangiz Kar's (2010) assessment of "Reformist Islam versus Radical Islam in Iran."

RAND experts construct the problems facing the United States in the Muslim world as a war of ideas "within Islam" among the four ideological positions of fundamentalism, traditionalism, modernism, and secularism in which the United States should participate to secure its interests. The best course of action, according to RAND strategists, is the promotion of modernist Islam: "Avoid artificially 'over-Islamizing the Muslims'; instead, accustom them to the idea that Islam can be just one part of their identity" (Benard 2003, 61). The ultimate goal is the development of variants of Islam that are Western: Euro-Islam, American Islam, German Islam projects that aim to amalgamate

aspects of Islam with modernity.

Senior RAND strategist Benard's suggested strategy for fostering a "civil, democratic Islam" is four-fold: giving wholehearted support to modernists by helping them with funds, infrastructure, and political support; supporting only those secularists that are amicable to the United States' values and policies; breaking any possible alliance between the traditionalists and the fundamentalists; and opposing the fundamentalists on all grounds. The ultimate aim is to manipulate how Islam is defined and interpreted. Accordingly, the main problem facing the United States and other like-minded Western countries is taking control of the definitional battle over the meaning of Islam and what it means to be a good Muslim. The task is to take away the initiative from "fundamentalists" who define Islam as an independent political and social order standing in contrast to Western civilization aiming to strengthen the Muslim *ummah*. "It is not desirable for fundamentalist Islam to become the default version," Benard writes (Benard 2003, 50).

As was noted before, Benard finds one of the key features of moderate, modernized Islam to be its reluctance to accept the religious authority and authenticity of original sources of Islam, including the Qur'an and *hadith*. Benard proposes capitalizing on the controversies surrounding reliable and authentic Islamic narrations and manipulating Muslim understanding and utility of *hadith* as a good way of enhancing the prospects of moderate Islam. Compilation of a body of counter-*hadith* that is amenable to Western values is believed to serve as "ammunition" for winning the *hadith* wars.

Benard's examination of the issue of *hijab*, the Muslim women dress code, as it relates to reforming Islam is also noteworthy. She urges the U.S. government to treat the issue of *hijab* not from the vantage point of religious freedom or pluralism: "*Hijab* is neither a neutral lifestyle issue nor a religious requirement; "It has become a political statement; "In the U.S. context wearing of *hijab* is seen as winning a battle against American culture; "*Hijab* is associated with

female subordination; and, "In short, far from being a placid 'lifestyle' issue suitable for demonstrating the U.S. propensity toward pluralism and tolerance, *hijab* is a minefield." (Benard 2003, 57-58)

Benard criticizes American media for framing *hijab* as a meaningful symbol of Muslim identity and a way of blending American and Muslim culture. She insists of the need for such views to be countered by the opposing argument that "many Muslim women oppose and resent *hijab* and that its religious validity is the subject of a major ongoing dispute" (Benard 2003, 59). She strongly endorses some European countries' treatment of *hijab* as a symbol of militant Islam, finding the ban on headscarves as a positive move. Ironically, the illiberal recommendation of restricting religious freedom is made as a means to liberalize Islam.

Two subsequent RAND reports, *The Muslim World After 9/11* and *Building Moderate Muslim Networks* (Rabasa et al. 2004; Rabasa et al. 2007) also call upon the United States to go beyond military means and fight this war "culturally and socially" (Rabasa 2004). The first proposes the following elements as parts of a successful strategy in the war of ideas: the creation of liberal groups; the creation of an international network of moderates; the provision of funds and organizational resources as a much needed "external catalyst"; disruption of radical networks through the breaking down of the trust relationship between Muslim masses and so-called militants and empowering so-called moderates to gain control of the existing Muslim networks that provide important social services; devising and executing carefully targeting psychological operations which is more important than freezing financial assets; looking at education as "a critical battlefield" – fostering *madrassa* reform, promoting mosque reform; and supporting "civil Islam." (Rabasa 2004, 60-67)

Building Moderate Muslim Networks reverberated the framing of the other two reports, but also added a new dimension: the utility of United States' Cold War experience in its war of ideas with the Soviet Union to the current situation concerning Islam. The report

diagnoses "the war of ideas" as the arbiter of the future direction of the Muslim world, but also defines the problem in a security framework. It addresses the need to provide funds and organizational resources to the right elements in Muslim communities; i.e. the modernist Muslims and liberal secularists, to amplify their voice and influence in the targeted populations. This is because the report assesses moderate, liberal, and secularist Muslims lacking the capacity for self-institutionalization and financing. Thus, what the United States government is asked to do is helping to form and strengthen the institutionalization of so-called moderate and secular elements in the Muslim world. While differences of context are also taken into consideration, the Cold War framework remains fundamental to the strategy devised in this report:

> What is needed at this stage is to derive lessons from the experience of the Cold War, determine their applicability to the conditions of the Muslim world today, and develop a "road map" for the construction of moderate and liberal Muslim networks –what this study proposes to do (Rabasa et al. 2007, iii).

During the Cold War, the U.S. government helped in anti-Communist network-building in four ways: 1) Helping to organize so-called democratic network-building groups such as labor unions, the Congress of Cultural Freedom; 2) Providing financial help, funding delivered through foundations to keep distance between U.S. government and the supported groups; the CIA covertly funded anti-Communist groups and causes; 3) Providing policy guidance, albeit at varying degrees. In the case of Radio Liberty, for example, policy was devised as a result of coordination among RL staff, the CIA and the Department of State; and, 4) Direct control of the major organizations' leadership, dubbed "direct assistance." In some cases, CIA staff served as assistants to the organizations' leadership; in other cases, "the U.S. government vetted and approved the heads of all of the major organizations" (Rabasa et al. 2007, 27-28).

The above four ways of network-building show how through the wide-ranging interference in the internal affairs of the targeted countries, the U.S. government was able to "quietly" change their social, cultural, and political climate to its own ends. The authors of the report assess the U.S. and British network-building activities as a vital element in winning the Cold War. In similar vein, they advise that network-building could well be the necessary component of an anti-Islamist war strategy.

According to the authors, the most important flaw in the current government efforts at engaging the Muslim world lies in its "symmetric" nature. The target audience is too wide for network-building:

> The current approach identifies the problem area as the Middle East and structures its programs accordingly. That area is much too large, too diverse, too opaque, and too much in the grip of immoderate sectors to allow for much traction (as reflected in the experience of MEPI). It can absorb very large amounts of resources with little or no impact (Rabasa et al. 2007, 142).

Based on cost-benefit rationality, the authors call for an "asymmetric" and "selective" strategy. They propose targeting a narrower segment of the Muslim population, meaning those who are found to fit the criteria given for moderate and liberal Muslims. Focusing on these sectors would create the backbone for networking. "Liberal and secular Muslim academics and intellectuals, young moderate religious scholars, community activists, women's groups engaged in gender equality campaigns, and moderate journalists and writers" are said to be the best targets for this purpose (Rabasa et al. 2007). Moderate Muslims are defined as such:

> Moderate Muslims are those who share the key dimensions of democratic culture. These include support for democracy and internationally recognized human rights (including gender equality and freedom of worship), respect for diversity, acceptance of nonsectarian sources of law, and opposition to terrorism and other illegitimate forms of violence (Rabasa et al.

 2007, 66).

Acceptance of democracy is further explained as opposition to the concept of an Islamic state, an explicit example of which is found to be the case of Iran's system of Islamic Republic.

Overall, the criteria for being an acceptable and "true" moderate as opposed to "opportunists" and "extremists camouflaged as moderates" is the rejection of Islamic law and the primacy of its original sources. The greater the distance one is ready to take from *Fiqh* and *shari'ah* and the more limited the role one allows for Islamic principles in social and political life, the more authentic of a representative is he or she of moderate Islam. The report calls for the creation of "an institutional structure within the U.S. government" to implement the above strategy and calls for the compilation of a database of acceptable partners based on the feedback of a core group of individuals and organizations (Rabasa et al. 2007, 141).

The authors recommend the implementation of four types of programs to promote moderate Islam: democratic education, media, gender equality, and policy advocacy. To add to the authority of democratic education, the use of Islamic texts and traditions is recommended. Policy advocacy is made parallel to the concept of *da'wa* and is said to be an important element of widening the appeal of so-called moderate Islam. Interestingly, the strategy does not preclude the possibility for the U.S. government "to make situational decisions to knowingly and for tactical reasons" support individuals other than those gauged by the report to have the merits to receive support. This statement could be interpreted as an affirmation of the on-again-off-again support the U.S. government has given and continues to give to elements within the fundamentalist type, including the Taliban and the Daish (Rabasa et al. 2007).

An important distinguishing feature of the recommended initiative is its asymmetric nature and its call for a shift in the flow of information from the periphery of the Muslim world to the heartland. In other words, the bulk of work is going to happen in the non-Arab

countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, as well as in the Muslim Diaspora living in Western countries. It is suggested that texts should be compiled in non-Arab languages in the periphery and then translated into Arabic and disseminated widely. The current situation is otherwise and is found to be detrimental to the promotion of so-called moderate Islam. Overall, to build moderate Muslim networks, the report recommends the launching of an initiative modeled on the Cold War-era Congress of Cultural Freedom. Given the strong CIA involvement in the congress during the Cold War, it seems that a similar role is envisioned for the CIA for creating this network of amenable Muslims (Rabasa et al. 2007, 143-144). Table 2 provides a comparison of the main strategies, tactics, and policy recommendations advocated by RAND and Brookings.

Table 2 Key Strategies, Tactics, and Policy Recommendations

Brookings	RAND
1. Overcome the Islamist dilemma. Faith is not a predictor of behavior. Not all Islamists are equal. Moderate Islamists are pragmatic. Islamism is a durable fact of the Middle East political scene due to wide public appeal. Democratization without Islamism is not possible.	1. Modernize Islam by fostering civil/democratic forms of Islam compatible with Western values. ✓ Take control of the definitional battle over the meaning of Islam and being a good Muslim as in waging *hadith* wars. ✓ Life style issues are important battlegrounds as the case of *hijab* shows.
2. Engage moderate/mainstream Islamists. ✓ Refrain from aiming to turn moderate Islamists to post-Islamists because it is counterproductive. ✓ Engage Islamists not only at low-level contacts, but also employ strategic dialogue and partnership.	2. Build moderate Muslim network. ✓ provide funds and organizational resources to modernist Muslims and liberal secularists ✓ Use the Cold War experience in network-building ✓ Look at education as a "critical battlefield" ✓ Foster madrassa and mosque reform
3. Reboot public diplomacy efforts. ✓ Break the narrative of American oppression and betrayal through appropriate policy initiatives. ✓ Institutionalize public diplomacy toward the Muslim world: ✓ Avoid governmental sponsoring of the reform of the religion of Islam.	3. Disrupt radical networks. ✓ Break the trust relationship between Muslim masses and so-called militants ✓ Break any alliance between traditionalists and fundamentalists. ✓ Fight fundamentalists on all fronts. ✓ Devise and execute carefully targeted psychological operations

IV- Overall Framing: "Good Islams vs. Bad Islams" and "Good Islamists vs. Bad Islamists"

The above review of Brookings and RAND projects on Islam reveals their distinct framing. For RAND, there is a war of ideas going on "within" Islam. The outcome of this war has high significance for and is highly consequential for United States' global interests. The United States should support those elements within Islam whose ideas are most compatible with Western values and interests. RAND strategists call for the construction of new forms of Islam that are civil and subordinate to modernism. Specific reference is made to Euro-Islam, American Islam, German Islam, etc. They suggest that it is imperative for the United States to actively engage in the process of reforming Islam by aiding the right elements within Muslim communities. The duality constructed here is good Islams vs. bad Islams. This frame is different from the good Muslim vs. bad Muslim framework. Ultimately modernization of the religion of Islam is seen as the only means to development and democracy. Such a theoretical position was popular in the Cold War as well.

Brookings experts argue that Islamism is not monolithic and that there are groups who could be defined as moderate with whom the United States should engage as the best means to achieve its interests in the region. Other premises that support a policy of engagement with moderate Islamist groups are as follows: moderate Islamists are pragmatist; belief is not a predictor of behavior; Islamism is popular in the Middle East and has overwhelming public support; mainstream Islamist movements are committed to the democratic process; democracy and liberalism are not necessarily synonymous; American support for autocratic regimes does not translate into stability. Therefore, the best course of action for the United States is engagement with moderate Islamists which is contingent on overcoming the Islamist dilemma. Engagement with the larger Muslim population is also necessary for alleviating anti-

Americanism in the region. The frame of good Islamist vs. bad Islamist emerges. Forfeiting the opportunity for engagement means losing the possibility of influencing domestic Muslim politics, which could lead Muslim populations into more abrupt paths to change such as was the case with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Conclusion

While RAND's and Brookings' approaches to the issue of U.S. policy toward Islamism are quite divergent, they share several important views. First, both otherize Islamism based on ontological and epistemological differences with the West. Second, neither finds legitimacy in a system of governance that is wholly constructed on Islamic ideas. Despite the inclusive approach of Brookings, only those Islamists found moderate are deemed acceptable political players in Muslim politics and only as long as that participation is defined in terms of a secular political system. The third point of convergence among the two think tanks is the emphasis on American interests in the region. Thus, engagement with either moderate Islamists in the case of Brookings or moderate Muslims in the case of RAND is an instrument for fulfilling the interests of the United States.

Finally, RAND and Brookings' extensive attention to U.S. policy toward Islam and Islamism stem from the widespread appeal of Islam in Muslim societies. The post-2011 uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa region showed the deep public appeal of Islamic politics. No longer could the long-held American policy of support for authoritarian regimes ensure stability in the region, a point reiterated by Brookings scholars but mostly concealed in the commentary of RAND strategists. It is in the best course of action in dealing with this situation that the two think tanks differ: RAND proposing that the United States promote the reformation of Islam, and Brookings suggesting that the U.S. government engage "moderate," "mainstream" Islamists to promote its foreign policy

objectives.

Despite the above four similarities, the comparison of the two approaches reveals the presence of the theme of modernization in RAND's works on Islam and its absence in the works of Brookings scholars. Pragmatism best describes Brookings' frame of reference. Brookings scholars believe that through strategic engagement, mainstream/moderate Islamist elements would make enough behavioral concessions to allow for the fulfillment of U.S. interests in the region. The two approaches are derivatives of different constructions of the reality of Muslim politics and society.

It is here argued that the RAND scholarship on Islam discussed above operates within the general theme of modernization backed by elements of Orientalism and Eurocentrism. Some examples are readily available from Benard's *Civil Democratic Islam*. She downgrades Muslim subjects to the level of Western civilization's problem child, one that has failed to thrive because of its antagonism toward the Western way of progress.

> Islam's current crisis has two main components: a failure to thrive and a loss of connection with the global mainstream. The Islamic world has been marked by a long period of backwardness and comparative powerlessness; many different solutions, such as nationalism, pan-Arabism, Arab socialism, and Islamic revolution, have been attempted without success, and this has led to frustration and anger. At the same time, the Islamic world has fallen out of step with contemporary global culture, an uncomfortable situation for both sides. (Benard 2003, ix)

Requiring Islam to go through reformation as a prerequisite to democratic development is also Orientalist. According to Benard, for Islam to be effectively reformed, it needs to become modernized in terms of its values and social, political norms: "Modernism, not traditionalism, is what worked for the West. This included the necessity to depart from, modify, and selectively ignore elements of the original religious doctrine" (Benard 2003, 37).

In a sense, the RAND reports rely on Orientalism as a deconstruction tool and Eurocentric religion-building as a reconstruction project. Reformation of Islam is seen through the lens of modernization, which is often equated with Westernization. Sayyid's definition of Eurocentrism is useful here. Eurocentrism is defined as "a multidimensional attempt to restore Western cultural practices as universal" (Sayyid 2003, 285). An *ummah*-centered Islamism can act as a real challenge to Eurocentrism and Orientalism disrupting the uneven power relations that have been built upon the two foundations.

Promotion of moderate Islam, with its attendant requirements of divorcing Islam from *shari'ah* and Islamic practices such as *hijab* – which are in fact public manifestations of religion, could well be analyzed as the new façade of "militant secular fundamentalism," to use John Esposito's (2000, 9) terminology for describing the sort of secularism and anti-religion stance of countries such as France. Militant secular fundamentalism hides beneath a veneer of Islamic terminology that has been emptied from any meaning and devoid of any power in public life.

The change of strategy from a strict promotion of secularism coupled with forced Westernization in the Muslim world, as was done under Atatürk and Reza Shah, to the promotion of moderate Islam, in the case of RAND, and engagement with moderate Islamists, in the case of Brookings, stems from the reality of Muslim politics ever since the last decades of the twentieth century (Esposito 2000, 9). In other words, RAND strategists conceal the battle between secularism and an active incorporation of Islam in politics. Instead, they highlight the battle of ideas within Islam.

The political thought of Imam Khomeini, with the success of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, gave a hard blow to the hegemony of what Sayyid calls "Kemalism" in the Muslim world and served as the most forceful counter-hegemonic force. Kemalism represents a "meta-narrative which endorses the idea that Westernization and

modernization are synonymous." Modernity and Eurocentrism are necessary conditions for the sustainability of the discourse of Kemalism. As Sayyid says, Kemalism is,

> only sustainable as long as the central tenets of the discourse
> of modernity remained largely uncontested – that is, as long as
> the West remained the criterion of human progress; as long as
> it could be represented as the 'most successful, most advanced'
> civilization; and as long as it could project its hegemony into
> the future, and could continue to play the role of a centre
> (Sayyid 2003, 119-120).

According to Sayyid, "it is only with [Imam] Khomeini that the role of Western discourse as universal interlocutor appears to be shaken. [Imam] Khomeini's political thought, alone among Muslim thinkers of the last hundred years, does not try to have a dialogue with Western discourse" (Sayyid 2003, 113-114). He "does not try to claim that Islam is 'real democracy', or that Islam anticipates socialism, or that Islam is compatible with science, etc. There is no obvious attempt to incorporate or even engage with political concepts associated with the discourses of nationalism, Marxism, liberalism" (Sayyid 2003, 113). It is an alternative system of governance.

Promotion of moderate Islam, as spelled out in the RAND reports, is an attempt at blocking such an interpretation of Islam in the Muslim world. So-called moderate Islam is in actuality the locking of Islamic thinkers in "a one-sided conversation with Western political thought … in which there is no space for anything other than the West," to use Sayyid's (2003, 114) words. As such, Islam loses all potential for building a civilization independent of the West.

Thus, the current framing of Islam and the compartmentalization of Muslims into pre-conceived categories of fundamentalist, traditionalist, moderate, and secular – which are grouped by the Western metric of modernity – refuses to define the situation as the emergence of competing models of development. The Western model of development remains the only viable, authoritative, and legitimate road to progress. Promotion of

moderate Islam is in essence an inheritance of modernization theory, which was the backbone of U.S. policy during the Cold War.

Gilman (2003) assesses modernization theory as representative of "the most explicit and systematic blueprint ever created by Americans for reshaping foreign societies" (5). In a time when the Western world had lost its physical grip on the colonized societies, modernization theory served as the blueprint for manipulating how those societies were shaped in the post-colonial world. "For modernization theorists, in contrast to strict economic development theorists, modernity was not just about a way of organizing economic production, but also about society and polity, cultural norms and forms" (Gilman 2003, 6). It was a reconstruction project based on the Western model. These theorists redefined modernity from one that described a specific European historical period to one that encapsulated a universal way to progress. They "stylized it into a spatio-temporally neutral model for the process of social development in general." (Habermas as quoted in Gilman 2003, 7). To use Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s words, modernization theory "represented a very American effort to persuade the developing countries to base their revolutions on Locke rather than on Marx" (Jr. as quoted in Gilman 2003, 10).

RAND's paternalistic style of religion-building is in essence a repackaged version of modernization theory that finds it the white man's burden to catalyze change in the essence of how Muslims interpret their religion. The RAND reports are ripe with terminology that directs the reader to the above assertion. For example, "liberal modernist Muslim thinking" is said to underscore the belief that "a moderate and modernized Islam that still remains true to its core principles will ultimately assist in the modernization of the Muslim world" (Rabasa et al. 2007, 93). Also, it is said, "A consistent view in liberal modernist Muslim thinking is that *shari'a* is a product of the historical circumstances of the time of its creation and that elements of it—for instance, corporal punishments — are no longer contextual

and therefore need to be modernized" (106). In short, the initiatives recommended by RAND are strategies for bringing about the "modernization of Islam" (130).

What is significant is the change in what modernization signifies. While before, as in the case of Ataturk and Reza Shah's policies, modernization was made synonymous with militant secularization and de-Islamization of society, RAND strategists now call for modernization of Islam itself, which is indicative of the growing significance of Islam in the developments in the Muslim world. Interestingly, Turkey is still seen as the hallmark of this type of modernization. In the past, Muslim lawful dress code was forcibly Westernized with the ban on *hijab*. The removal of *hijab* was seen as an element of modernization. Today *hijab* is again attacked but now under the rubric of modernist Islamic thinking. It is the will to resist that is being attacked. The very obligation of *hijab* is being undermined using Muslim actors and Islamic ideas. Using the concepts of hard and soft power, one could argue that the RAND stance on modernizing Islam is indicative of a movement from hard modernization to soft modernization and similarly from hard Westernization to soft Westernization. Such an approach, according to Brookings, is pragmatically flawed and detrimental to U.S. interests in the region.

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