



FIXING RELIGION?

An Introduction to RAND & Its Strategies to Doctor Islam

THE RAND CORP. IS A 60-YEAR-OLD SEMI-AUTONOMOUS research think-tank for U.S. providing “objective analysis and effective solutions” that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. It goes without saying that Islam is one such challenge that needs immediate addressing and fixing up. It has taken RAND Corp. three distinct yet complementary reports to strategize how this can best be done—and it can best be done through the moderates within the Muslim societies—so it is said.

BY OMAR JAVAID

The RAND Corp. claims to seek only to bring institutional democracy, economic development and social progressiveness in the Muslim world and nothing else. The claim is not only invalid and void but hypocritical through and through, something which I shall discuss in its appropriate place.

These reports and more do concern the Muslim World and as such must at least be heard about, if not read. The reason being: it will make you more aware of the social players around you at work and their underlying objectives. Besides, it is also an opportunity to clarify to the unsuspecting minds (Muslims or non-Muslims) about the true facts and nature of Islam while keeping them distant from such propagandas. It is also an opportunity of realization that Islam—our beautiful religion—is under threat. It is under threat both by people



Dr. Angel M. Rabasa: is a RAND Corporation Senior Policy Analyst. He is the lead author of *The Muslim World After 9/11* (December 2004) and has just completed a project on the future of global terrorism: “Beyond Al Qaeda: Countering Terrorist and Other Non-Traditional Threats.” Before joining the RAND Corporation, Dr. Rabasa served in a variety of political-military positions in the U.S. Departments of State and Defense. He has a B.A. and Ph.D. in history from Harvard University and was a Knox Fellow at St. Antony's College, Oxford University

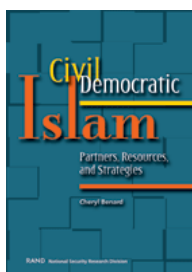


Cheryl Benard: Benard is an analyst at RAND Corp. and also the Director of the Initiative for Middle Eastern Youth (IMEY) Program. She is the wife of Dr. Zalmay Mamozy Khalilzad who is the highest ranking native Afghani and Muslim in the administration of U.S. President George W. Bush. Mrs. Benard has also written many feminist-themed novels ridiculing Muslim women who wear Hijab which she

from the within (hypocrites) and people from the without who are bent on redefining its principles in strict conformance to the Western socioeconomic and political ideals.

CIVIL DEMOCRATIC ISLAM: PARTNERS, RESOURCES, AND STRATEGIES

BY Cheryl Benard, 2003



The suggestions in this report, by Cheryl Benard, according to Abdus Sattar Ghazali, the Executive Editor of 'American Muslim Perspectives', are nothing more than a "Machiavellian manifesto that seeks to enforce Western

hegemony and cultural imperialism through the policy of 'divide-and-rule.' The type of Islam that Benard espouses is a passive and weak Islam that can be easily penetrated and hence reformulated to suit the West's agenda... The recipe to achieve this objective is to encourage and promote the so-called modernist Muslims and play one section of the society against another to split it (into different factions).'

Benard does not hesitate to divide the 1.3 billion Muslims in the world into four (4) simple categories:

- The Fundamentalists... who "reject

democratic values and contemporary Western Culture;"

- The Traditionalists... who "are suspicious of modernity, innovation, and change;"
- The Modernists... who "want the Islamic World to become part of global modernity;" and
- The Secularists... who "want the Islamic World to accept the division of religion and State."

Benard believes that the Modernists are the West's allies in the Muslims world. She further goes on to define the parameters of this particular Muslim group:

- Modernists believe that Islam is responsible for the underdevelopment of the Muslims because prosperity and progress depends on modernity and democracy (and so the drive for secularism).
- Modernists believe in the historicity of Islam, i.e., that Islam as it was practiced in the days of the Prophet reflected eternal truths as well as historical circumstances that were appropriate to that time but are no longer valid.
- Modernists do not regard the original Islamic community or the early years of Islam as something that one would necessarily wish to reproduce today.
- Modernists believe that some verses (suras) may have been falsely or inaccurately recorded in the Quran.

- Modernists believe that the Quran is legend.

It was Angel M. Rabasa (2007) in his report titled 'Building Muslim Moderates Network' who actually went as further as to name some of the personalities that actually fit the description. Not surprisingly, these personalities include only the prominent Islam-bashers: Ayaan Hirsi, Salman Rushdie, Taslima Nasreen, Irshad Manji, Basam Tibi, etc. Imagine—Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasreen as the role models of "ideal Islam!" This goes on to show exactly what type of Islam is being envisaged and propagated for in these strategic reports.

The 88-page report is divided into three chapters and supported by four appendixes. One of the most important tables in the report is 'Marker Issues and the Major Ideological Positions in Islam' which carefully outlines the stance of all the fundamentalists, traditionalists, modernists, and secularists in the Muslim world on all controversial issues. What is important to know is that Benard has further subdivided the Fundamentalists into the Radical and Scriptural Fundamentalists, the Traditionalists into Conservative and Reformist Traditionalists, and the Secularists into Mainstream and Radical Secularists. There are however no sub-divisions in the Modernist's category.

Cheryl Benard suggests the following strategy-mix to align Islam in toe with the Western agenda:

"Pakistan, for example, is home to a vocal and politically potent fundamentalist segment; it also has a significant traditionalist population; and politically, it wishes to affiliate itself with the modern international community. How can the country reconcile these goals on the issue of Islamic criminal justice? Abandoning shari'a law would alienate the fundamentalists and portions of the traditionalists, but amputating hands and stoning adulterers would lead to international condemnation and alienate domestic modernists and some traditionalists. **The solution: Impose shari'a sentences but do not carry them out."**

BOX A: CIVIC DEMOCRATIC ISLAM: THE STRATEGY (p.63)

Support the Modernists First:

- Create Role Models and Leaders
- Publish and distribute their works at subsidized cost.
- Encourage them to write for mass audiences and for youth.
- Introduce their views into the curriculum of Islamic education.
- Give them a public platform.
- Make their opinions and judgments on fundamental questions of religious interpretation available to a mass audience in competition with those of the fundamentalists and traditionalists, who have Web sites, publishing houses, schools, institutes, and many other vehicles for disseminating their views.
- Position secularism and modernism as a “counterculture” option for disaffected Islamic youth.
- Facilitate and encourage an awareness of their pre- and non-Islamic history and culture, in the media and the curricula of relevant countries.
- Assist in the development of independent civic organizations, to promote civic culture and provide a space for ordinary citizens to educate themselves about the political process and to articulate their views.
- Develop Western Islam: German Islam, U.S. Islam, etc.

Support the Traditionalists Against the Fundamentalists:

- Publicize traditionalist criticism of fundamentalist violence and extremism; encourage disagreements between traditionalists and fundamentalists.
- Discourage alliances between traditionalists and fundamentalists.
- Encourage cooperation between modernists and the traditionalists who are closer to the modernist end of the spectrum.
- Where appropriate, educate the traditionalists to equip them better for debates against fundamentalists. Fundamentalists are often rhetorically superior, while traditionalists practice a politically inarticulate “folk Islam.”

In such places as Central Asia, they may need to be educated and trained in orthodox Islam to be able to stand their ground.

- Increase the presence and profile of modernists in traditionalist institutions.

- Publicize the consequences of their violent acts.
- Demonstrate their inability to rule, to achieve positive development of their countries and communities.
- Address these messages especially to

“ Support the idea that religion and the state can be separate in Islam too and that this does not endanger the faith but, in fact, may strengthen it. ”

- Discriminate between different sectors of traditionalism. Encourage those with a greater affinity to modernism, such as the Hanafi law school, versus others. Encourage them to issue religious opinions and popularize these to weaken the authority of backward Wahhabi inspired religious rulings. This relates to funding: Wahhabi money goes to the support of the conservative Hanbali school. It also relates to knowledge: More-backward parts of the Muslim world are not aware of advances in the application and interpretation of Islamic law.
- Encourage the popularity and acceptance of Sufism.

Confront and Oppose the Fundamentalists:

- Challenge their interpretation of Islam and expose inaccuracies.
- Reveal their linkages to illegal groups and activities.

young people, to pious traditionalist populations, to Muslim minorities in the West, and to women.

- Avoid showing respect or admiration for the violent feats of fundamentalist extremists and terrorists. Cast them as disturbed and cowardly, not as evil heroes.
- Encourage journalists to investigate issues of corruption, hypocrisy, and immorality in fundamentalist and terrorist circles.
- Encourage divisions among fundamentalists.

Selectively Support Secularists:

- Encourage recognition of fundamentalism as a shared enemy, discourage secularist alliance with anti-U.S. forces on such grounds as nationalism and leftist ideology.
- Support the idea that religion and the state can be separate in Islam too and that this does not endanger the faith but, in fact, may strengthen it.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What is time and again deliberately forgotten despite the overwhelming proofs is that 9/11 was a homegrown saga. No Muslim hijacked any plane and crashed it into WTO or the Pentagon—they were framed! To this bear the testimonies of leading and influential people from the U.S. Military & Intelligence itself, the Media, the University Professors, the Survivors, and even the Witnesses of the event. This fact alone is a complete rebuttal to the argument that Islam needs to be “fixed” for its violent and extremist tendencies thus rendering all these reports baseless.
2. Hypocrisy and intellectual prostitution is self-evident in these reports. On the one hand the Authors express their sincere desire for Muslims to establish institutional democracy in their respective countries, and on the other, 180°, there is an outspoken appreciation for military authoritarianism with respect to countries like Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia etc. This very fact proves that the call for democracy is a sham and the actual agenda is to only establish puppet regimes. Otherwise why would the same fundamentalist lot fighting the Soviets in 1980s were called the “the founding fathers of U.S.” (President Regan, 16 June 1986) only to be now renounced as Al-Qaeda terrorists?
3. The Authors clearly presume the infallibility of their own socioeconomic and political systems. No wonder they want to see every civilization run their societies on secular and modern lines—especially the Islamic civilization. What needs to be asked and answered is about the ideology that was operating behind the world wars that needlessly claimed millions of lives—atheism/secularism or Islamism? The only threat to the peace and security of this world is atheism/secularism and not Islam—and this is an empirical fact not a slogan.
4. The strategy to split 1.3 billion Muslims (every fifth person in the world) into factions and setting them off against each another shows how narrow-minded, intolerant and perverted the minds of these Authors are. Instead of celebrating diversity of languages, race, color, culture, and lifestyles of these Muslims—it is being suggested to install conflict and concord between them. This reveals the hostility they have for the plurality of Islam, which brings me to my last point...
5. The fact that these Authors are suggesting to choke down modernism and secularism into the throat of Islamic World—which

by the way are hallmarks of Western Civilization—goes on to show their hostility for plurality and diversity in Islam. It shows how intolerant, narrow-minded, and bigoted they are. What they don't want to see is any independent culture, economics and political system (civilization) taking form and roots anywhere in the world. Their main agenda is to westernize and Americanize everything—especially Islam.

SUPER SUMMARY

The RAND reports have two-fold agenda: 1) Try to create a version of Islam that suits the post 9/11 western agenda; and 2) creating divisions in the Muslim society at home and abroad.

The recipe to achieve these objectives is to encourage and promote the so-called modernist Muslims and play one section of the society against another to split it into different opposing factions. In the report released in December 2004, the RAND Corp. specifically elaborated on the second agenda and recommended playing the two major Muslim sects, Sunnis and Shiites, against each other to achieve policy objectives.

The focus is also to be on education and youth, since “committed adult adherents of radical Islamic movements are unlikely to be easily influenced into changing their views. The next generation, however, can conceivably be influenced if the message of democratic Islam can be inserted into school curricula and public media in the pertinent countries.”

It may not be out of place to mention that efforts are already underway to eliminate Quranic Verses from school textbooks in Muslim countries. In Pakistan, the government is trying to eliminate Quranic Verses from school textbooks amid mounting opposition from religious and non-religious political parties. In 1990s Kuwaiti Education Minister, Dr. Rubai, was forced to resign when he ordered deletion of the Quranic verses from the school textbooks. To many Muslims, deletion of verses from the school textbooks is an endeavor to open a window for editing the Quran that survived 1400 years of distortion attempts.

The RAND reports list Salman Rushdie (author of the ‘Satanic Verses’) as a moderate Muslim and an ideal role model for the modern Islam!

The report concludes by giving several examples of moderate Muslims, and not surprisingly they include prominent Islam bashers. The list includes Ayaan Hirsi Ali; Salman Rushdie, Taslima Nasreen, Irshad Manji, Basam Tibi, etc.

“A Muslim who supports Israel's right to exit as a Jewish State is central to the definition of a moderate Muslim.” -

Gary Ratner, Executive Director of American Jewish Congress (AJC)

“... Secularists should be our most natural allies in the Muslim world.”

THE MUSLIM WORLD AFTER 9/11

By Angel M. Rabasa, 2004



In another report, released in December 2004, 'The Muslim World After 9-11,' authored by Angel M. Rabasa, the RAND Corp. further elaborated upon the divide-and-conquer policy and recommended playing the two major Muslim sects, Sunnis and Shiites, against each other to achieve the policy

objectives.

Angel M. Rabasa suggests the following strategy-mix:

“The military will continue to be an influential political actor across the Muslim world. In some countries—Pakistan, for instance—the military will likely control the state for the policy-relevant future. More often than not, the military is on the fore front of the war on terrorism. In Turkey and Indonesia, the military establishments are also pillars of their respective countries’ secular political institutions. Therefore, military-to-military relations will be of particular importance to any U.S. shaping strategy in the Muslim world. Rebuilding a core of U.S.-trained officers in key Muslim countries is therefore a critical need. Programs such as International Military Education and Training (IMET) not only ensure that future military leaders are exposed to American military values and practices but can also translate into increased U.S. influence and access.”

BOX B: SOCIAL, POLITICAL, & MILITARY OPTIONS TO HELP MUSLIMS “REINTERPRET ISLAM”

Promote Moderate Network Creation

Liberal and moderate Muslims, although a majority in almost all countries, have not created similar networks. Their voices are often fractured or silenced. The battle for Islam will require the creation of liberal groups to retrieve Islam from the hijackers of the religion. Creation of an international network is critical because such a network would provide a platform to amplify the message of moderates and also to provide them some protection. However, moderates do not have the resources to create this network themselves. The initial impulse may require an external catalyst.

Disrupt Radical Networks

Once the characteristics of these networks are known and their recruitment patterns and weaknesses identified, a strategy of nodal disruption could be implemented to break up these networks and to empower Muslim moderates to take over the transmission belts that sustain the networks.

Expand Economic Opportunities

Assistance from U.S. and international sources needs to be channeled in ways that are appropriate to local circumstances and, to the extent possible, rely on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with existing relationships in the recipient countries. Funding for education and cultural programs run by secular or moderate Muslim organizations should be a priority to counter the influence of radical groups.

Support “Civil Islam”

Support of or stronger links with “civil

Islam”—Muslim civil society groups that advocate moderation and modernity—is an essential component of an effective U.S. policy toward the Muslim world. Funding of educational and cultural activities by secular or moderate Muslim organizations should be a priority.

Deny Resources to Extremists

The point of origin of the funding is Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Gulf. The Saudis have begun to take steps to monitor their funding activities more closely and to close down the branches of some suspect charities, but it is unclear that there are adequate safeguards to ensure that funds are not diverted to extremist or terrorist organizations. The technical capabilities of the recipient countries also need to be strengthened to give them the capability to monitor and, when necessary, to interdict suspect financial flows.

Seek to Engage Islamists in Normal Politics

While there is always a danger that an Islamist party, once in power, may move against democratic freedoms, the inclusion of such groups within existing, open democratic institutions may have the effect over time of taming the threat they pose to the system. This is particularly the case in parts of the Muslim world that have stronger democratic traditions in which public opinion can be expressed through the ballot box and whose governments have ties to broad international alliances. An unequivocal commitment to nonviolence and democratic processes should be a prerequisite for inclusion. For its part, the United States

should register its opposition to electoral machinations designed to marginalize legitimate opposition parties.

Engage Muslim Diasporas

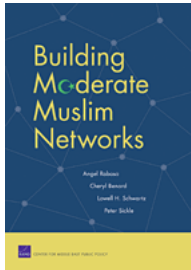
Engagement of diaspora Muslim communities can also help the United States advance its interests in the Muslim world. The U.S. Muslim communities are a unique source of cultural information that can be harnessed to the promotion of democracy and pluralism in the Muslim world. One possibility is working with Muslim NGOs in responding to humanitarian crises in the Muslim world.

Rebuild Close Military-to-Military Relations with Key Countries

The military will continue to be an influential political actor across the Muslim world. In some countries—Pakistan, for instance—the military will likely control the state for the policy-relevant future. More often than not, the military is on the fore front of the war on terrorism. In Turkey and Indonesia, the military establishments are also pillars of their respective countries’ secular political institutions. Therefore, military-to-military relations will be of particular importance to any U.S. shaping strategy in the Muslim world. Rebuilding a core of U.S.-trained officers in key Muslim countries is therefore a critical need. Programs such as International Military Education and Training (IMET) not only ensure that future military leaders are exposed to American military values and practices but can also translate into increased U.S. influence and access.

BUILDING MODERATE MUSLIM NETWORKS

By Angel M. Rabasa, 2007



Only recently, in 2007, Angel M. Rabasa has written yet another report for RAND Corp. titled: “Building Moderate Muslim Networks” pointing out the various social sectors that could and would constitute the building blocks of the

proposed moderate Muslim networks. These social sectors include, in priority wise: (Box C)

Furthermore, he also suggests that the programs directed at the above audiences should have the following foci: democratic education, media, gender equality, and policy advocacy. (Box D)

With regard to geographic focus, Angel Rabasa proposes a shift of priorities from the Middle East to the regions of the Muslim world where greater freedom of action is possible, where environment is more open to activism and influence, and where success is more likely and more perceptible.

The report concludes by giving several examples of moderate Muslims, and not surprisingly they include prominent Islam bashers. The list includes Ayaan Hirsi Ali; Salman Rushdie, Taslima Nasreen, Irshad Manji, Basam Tibi, etc.

BOX C: “HOW TO” ENGAGE SOCIAL SECTORS TO BUILD MODERATE MUSLIM NETWORKS

1. Liberal and secular Muslim academics and intellectuals

This sector is the primary building bloc for an international moderate Muslim network.

2. Young moderate religious scholars

A liberal or moderate Muslim movement with a mass base will depend on enlisting the active participation of moderate clerics, particularly of young clerics, who will become the religious leadership of the future.

3. Community activists

The muscle of this initiative, community activists propagate the ideas developed by liberal and moderate intellectuals. They take real personal risks by confronting often-violent extremists in the battle of ideas, and are the victims of fatwas and violent attacks. These groups, therefore, are most in need of the protection and support that an international network can provide

4. Women’s groups engaged in gender equality campaigns

Groups and organizations have emerged to advance women’s rights and opportunities in the areas of legal rights,

health, education, and employment. This upsurge in women’s civil-society groups in turn provides opportunities for moderate network-building.

5. Moderate journalists, writers, and communicators.

Through the use of the Internet and other new media outside of governments’ control, radical messages have penetrated deeply into Muslim communities around the world. To reverse radical trends in the Muslim media, therefore, it will be critical to support local moderate radio and television programming, as well as Web sites and other nontraditional media.

BOX D: FOCUS OF ATTENTION

1. Democratic education:

...particularly programs that use Islamic texts and traditions for authoritative teachings that support democratic and pluralistic values

2. Media.

Support for moderate media is critical to combating media domination by anti-

democratic and conservative Muslim elements.

3. Gender equality.

The issue of women’s rights is a major battleground in the war of ideas within Islam, and women’s rights advocates operate in very adverse environments. Promotion of gender equality is a critical component of any project to empower

moderate Muslims.

4. Policy advocacy.

Islamists have political agendas, and moderates need to engage in policy advocacy as well. Advocacy activities are important in order to shape the political and legal environment in the Muslim world.

RESPONSE FROM THE MUSLIM WORLD:

“The Rand reports try to create a fictitious vision of Muslims and of Islam, where it is antihuman, uncreative, authoritarian, and intrinsically against Western societies. It is an ethnocentric view of Islam that dominates current representations of Islam that are reductive, predominantly negative, and encouraging a culture of Islamophobia.”
Abdus Sattar Ghazli
Executive Editor, ‘American Muslim Perspective’

“...it is a purely ideologically motivated effort to perpetuate the friction and misunderstandings between the United States and Muslim societies, rather than to find positive solutions through mutual respect.”
Sheikh Mohamed El-Moctar El-Shinqiti
Imam, The Islamic Center of South Plains,
Lubbock, Texas, USA

“I feel greatly offended by this think tank, which is known for its bias against Islam. It claims the right to define the concepts, the description, and the thoughts for a nation that almost represents the third of the world. It further suggests to it a new God, religion, and prophet.”
Dr. Taha Jaber Al-'Alwany
President, The School of Islamic and Social Sciences, USA

“The Shari`ah offers women status and rights that are unprecedented in Western societies and not available in contemporary Western legal systems.”
Dr. Muhammad Ra'fat Othman
The Islamic Research Academy, Member,
Egypt

“It is not helpful to resort to self-serving arbitrary, undefined, and stereotypical, and often times superficial classifications of other people.”
Dr. Jamal Badawi
Professor of Management and Religious Studies, Saint Mary's University in Halifax,
Nova Scotia, Canada

“The report concludes by giving several examples of moderate Muslims, and surprisingly they include prominent Islam bashers. The list includes Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Salman Rushdie, Taslima Nasreen, Irshad Manji, Basam Tibi, etc. Ultimately, it is not commitment to democratic values and practices, but proximity to Islam, that sets moderates and radicals in the eyes of the author of the recent RAND report on moderate Islam.”
Dr. Louay M. Safi
Executive Director, ISNA Leadership

Development Center, Indiana, USA

“...the report considers the application of Islamic Shari`ah to be a form of racism, while in fact, this view is racist in its own right.”
Dr. Nasr Farid Wasil
Former Mufti of Egypt

“They avoid speaking about the oppression that is widespread all over the world as well as about the double-standard policy that governs the world, in addition to other such causes that stir up terrorism. They only advocate conflicts between civilizations, as they serve the interests of weapons mafia and provokers of wars, like what is happening in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Palestine.”
By Sheikh Husain Halawah
Secretary General, European Council for Fatwa and Research

Ref: Islamonline.net

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