



READINGS IN INTELLECTUAL DISCOURSES AND TRENDS (2)

Recommendations to Support the Moderate Trends Among Muslim Communities

Analytic Summary of the RAND Report (2007)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Recommendations to Support the Moderate Trends Among Muslim Communities -
Analytic Summary of the RAND Report (2007)
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RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT THE MODERATE TRENDS AMONG MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

ANALYTIC SUMMARY OF THE RAND REPORT (2007)¹

SUBJECT

An executive summary of the RAND report that has been published lately concerning “Building Moderate Muslim Networks” in the Muslim World.

ANALYTIC BRIEF

The latest RAND report entitled: ‘Building Moderate Muslim Networks’ discusses the reasons why the radical and dogmatic interpretation of Islam has gained popularity, and why these voices have become the rallying cry for those who want to voice their discontent at the status quo.

The report also discusses the reasons why the radicals have such a prominent voice despite the fact they represent a minority within Muslim societies and why the Moderate majority is largely silent (it also defines who the Moderates are), the advantage the radicals have being 1) Money, and 2) Organization.

The report then goes on to give reasons for the US to create moderate Muslim Networks and goes on to describe how network building was done during the Cold War, while analyzing the similarities and differences between the Cold War environment and radical Islam, as well as examining current US engagement with the Muslim world and develops a road map for the construction of Muslim networks and institutions.

The report states that the lessons learned from the Cold War provide a model for policymakers today.

1. This summary and analysis has been prepared by Tabah Research based on the 2007 RAND Report: «Building Moderate Muslim Networks». The original 2007 RAND Report summary can be found at the following link: http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND_MG574.sum.pdf

ANALYSIS BACKGROUND

The latest RAND report entitled, “Building Moderate Muslim Networks”² is a follow on from the two previous RAND reports entitled, “Civil Democratic Islam”³ and “The Muslim World after 9/11,”⁴ and focuses on identifying partners and a strategy for working with them.

The first RAND report focused on identifying the players, the second report on: the need to Promote Moderate Network Creation, Disrupt Radical Networks,⁵ and Deny Resources to Extremists.⁶ This report focuses on the Moderates in terms of the characteristics that constitute a moderate and a Road Map to working with them.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERATE MUSLIMS

The first point to be taken into account is that of definition regarding who the Moderate Muslims are. The report states:

*Distinguishing between authentic moderates and extremists masquerading as moderates presents a major difficulty in Western programs of engagement with Muslim communities. A key finding of this report—which one of our reviewers notes is particularly important—is that the US government and its allies need, but thus far have failed, to develop clear criteria identifying authentic moderates.*⁷

2. Angel M. Rabasa, Cheryl Benard, Lowell H. Schwartz, Peter Sickle, “Building Moderate Muslim Networks”, RAND Corporation.

3. Cheryl Benard, “Civil Democratic Islam; Partners, Resources, and Strategies”, RAND Corporation 2003.

4. Angel M. Rabasa, Cheryl Benard, Peter Chalk, C. Christine Fair, Theodore Karasik, Rollie Lal, Ian Lesser, and David Thaler, “The Muslim World after 9/11”, Project Air Force (Prepared for the US Air Force), RAND Corporation 2004.

5. “The Muslim World After 9/11”, p. xxii.

6. Ibid., p. xxiv.

7. “Building Moderate Muslim Networks”, p. 3.

According to the RAND report there are four characteristics of Moderate Muslims:

1. Democracy
2. Acceptance of Nonsectarian Sources of Law
3. Respect for the Rights of Women and Religious Minorities
4. Opposition to Terrorism and Illegitimate Violence⁸

Democracy here refers to the notion as understood in the Liberal Western Tradition, whether these Moderate Muslims take the view that Democratic Values are Universal and not contingent on a particular cultural or religious context (which is the Humanist View commonly held in the West and which is deemed Eurocentric by some), or those who validate the Democratic model on the basis of Scriptural evidence, the RAND report does not seem to mind which of the two modes are used and states:

In either case, what matters is the results. Whether a political philosophy derives from Western or Quranic sources, to be considered democratic it must unequivocally support pluralism and internationally recognized human rights.⁹

The report further goes on to state:

“Support for democracy implies opposition to concepts of the Islamic state—particularly those that imply the exercise of political power by a self-appointed clerical elite, as in the case of Iran. Muslim moderates hold the view that no one can speak for God. Rather, it is the consensus of the community (ijma), as reflected in freely expressed public opinion, that determines what God’s will is in any particular case. Within Twelver Shi’ite Islam there is a long tradition of quietism, a Shi’ite religious tradition that is wary of political authority, seeing it as lacking in divine sanction in the absence

8. Ibid., pp. 66-68.

9. Ibid., p. 66.

*of the Imam. This tradition has been subverted by theocratic Khomeinist notions in Iran and in other places where the Iranian regime exercises influence; nevertheless, it persists in Iraq and elsewhere as a potential substratum for democratic development”.*¹⁰

Of note is the fact the notion of the Consensus (*Ijma‘*) of the community used here does not mean the people who loose and bind (*Ahl al-Hal wa al-Aqd*) but is redefined to mean the masses.

ACCEPTANCE OF NONSECTARIAN SOURCES OF LAW

The report distinguishes between the Moderates and the Radicals by stating:

*The dividing line between moderate Muslims and radical Islamists in countries with legal systems based on those of the West (the majority of states in the Muslim world) is whether shari‘a should apply.*¹¹

The report goes on to quote the Liberal Sudanese writer Abdullahi An-Naim who:

*points out, men and women and believers and unbelievers do not have equal rights under shari‘a. In addition, due to the diversities of opinion in Islamic law, any enactment of shari‘a principles as law would mean enforcing the political will of those in power, selecting some opinions over others, and thereby denying believers and others freedom of choice.*¹²

So the Islamic principle that in a matter of differing opinions regarding juristic interpretations the Muslim Ruler can arbitrate and choose which opinion is to be followed is considered a denial of the believers freedom of choice, that being the case the same critique could be applied to any other system of governance as the Political Ideology of the Government usually dictates how policies are executed.

10. Ibid., pp. 66-67.

11. Ibid., p. 67.

12. Ibid., p.67.

RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

The report states that:

Moderates are hospitable to Muslim feminists and open to religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue. Moderates argue, for instance, that discriminatory injunctions in the Quran and the sunna relating to women's position within the society and the family (for example, that a daughter's inheritance should be half that of a son's) should be reinterpreted on the grounds that conditions today are not the same as those that prevailed in the Prophet Muhammad's day.¹³

In the same breath the report continues:

Moderates also defend women's right of access to education and health services and right to full participation in the political process, including the right to hold political offices. Similarly, moderates advocate equal citizenship and legal rights for non-Muslims.¹⁴

The two matters are quite distinct most Muslims would advocate for women's right of access to education and health services indeed the Prophet Blessings and Peace be upon him educated women, and even our Jurists permit that a woman's be examined by a male medical professional in the absence of an alternative.

OPPOSITION TO TERRORISM AND ILLEGITIMATE VIOLENCE

The report states:

Moderate Muslims, just like adherents of other religious traditions, have a concept of the just war. According to Mansur Escudero, leader of the Federación Española de Entidades Religiosas Islámicas [Spanish

¹³. Ibid., pp. 67-68.

¹⁴. Ibid., p. 68.

Federation of Islamic Religious Entities] (FEERI), it would be false to say that Islam does not contemplate violence. The important thing is to define the ethical principles that regulate violence: what kinds of violence are legitimate and what kinds are not?

How and in what form is violence employed is of outmost importance in determining its legitimacy. Violence against civilians and suicide operations, that is to say, terrorism, is not legitimate.

It is, however, legitimate to use violence defensively to protect Muslims against aggressors. Legitimate violence must respect normative limits, such as using the minimum force required, respecting the lives of noncombatants, and avoiding ambushes and assassinations.¹⁵

The report then follows on and states (under the sub-heading Application of Criteria):¹⁶

*It follows from the above that for a group to declare itself “democratic” in the sense of favoring elections as the vehicle for establishing government—as in the case of the present Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood—is not enough. Just as important is respect for freedom of expression, association, and religion (and the freedom not to be religious as well): what we called in *The Muslim World After 9/11* the “infrastructure of democratic political processes.” Therefore, in determining whether a group or movement meets this characterization of moderation, a reasonably complete picture of its worldview is needed.¹⁷*

15. Ibid., p.68, from the author’s discussion with Mansur Escudero, Spain, August 2005, and Patricia Martinez, “Deconstructing Jihad: Southeast Asian Contexts,” in Kumar Ramakrishna and See Seng Tan (eds.), *After Bali: The Threat of Terrorism in Southeast Asia, Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies*, Nanyang Technological University, 2003; and Youssef Aboul-Enein and Sherifa Zuhur, *Islamic Rulings on Warfare*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, Pa., October 2004.

16. “Building Moderate Muslim Networks, RAND Corporation”, 2007, p. 68.

17. The report also cites: “Networking individuals and groups whose credentials as moderates have not been firmly established or networking pseudo-moderates not only is a waste of resources, it can be counterproductive. The Danish imams who caused the cartoon controversy to spiral into an international conflagration had earlier been presumed to be moderates and had been the beneficiaries of state support, including travel and networking opportunities. Closer scrutiny after the incident revealed that these individuals were not true moderates at all.” See “Building Moderate Muslim Networks”, p. xxiii.

This picture can emerge from the answers given to the following questions:

- *Does the group (or individual) support or condone violence? If it does not support or condone violence now, has it supported or condoned it in the past?*
- *Does it support democracy? And if so, does it define democracy broadly in terms of individual rights?*
- *Does it support internationally recognized human rights?*
- *Does it make any exceptions (e.g., regarding freedom of religion)?*
- *Does it believe that changing religions is an individual right?*
- *Does it believe the state should enforce the criminal-law component of shari'a?*
- *Does it believe the state should enforce the civil-law component of shari'a? Or does it believe there should be non-shari'a options for those who prefer civil-law matters to be adjudicated under a secular legal system?*
- *Does it believe that members of religious minorities should be entitled to the same rights as Muslims?*
- *Does it believe that a member of a religious minority could hold high political office in a Muslim majority country?*
- *Does it believe that members of religious minorities are entitled to build and run institutions of their faith (churches and synagogues) in Muslim majority countries?*
- *Does it accept a legal system based on nonsectarian legal Principles? Beyond ideology, it is also necessary to ask questions about the relationships of these groups to other political actors and the*

*consequences and effects of these relationships. For instance, are they aligned in political fronts with radical groups? Do they receive funding or support radical foundations?*¹⁸

Since the publication of the report there has been a lot of polemics as to who is intended; is it the secularists, the modernists, the Sufis etc? What should be really apparent is that the groups intended are those to whom the above characteristics apply, as Malcolm X said: “if the shoe doesn’t fit don’t wear it”, the report writers even seem to be having problems of taxonomy in regard to categorizing some Muslims for example the 2003 report stated:

*Sufis are not a ready match for any of the categories, but we will here include them in modernism. Sufism represents an open, intellectual interpretation of Islam*¹⁹

in the latest report the Sufis are:

*Traditionalists and Sufis probably constitute the large majority of Muslims. They are often, but not always, conservative Muslims who uphold beliefs and traditions passed down through the centuries.*²⁰

on the same page the report continues and states:

*They do not engage in unmediated interpretation of the Quran and the hadith (the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad), as Salafists and modernists do.*²¹

18. Ibid., pp.68-70.

19. “Civil Democratic Islam; Partners, Resources, and Strategies”, p. 46.

20. Building Moderate Muslim Networks, RAND Corporation 2007, p. 73.

21. Ibid.

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THE LESSONS OF THE COLD WAR

The RAND report states:

The close link between the US grand strategy and its efforts to build democratic networks was a key ingredient in the overall success of the

19. “Civil Democratic Islam”, p. 46.

20. “Building Moderate Muslim Networks”, p. 73.

21. Ibid.

*US policy of containment; as such, it provides a model for policymakers today.*²²

The problem here is that implicit in this statement is the notion that Islam is being viewed as a Political Ideology (i.e. an organized group of ideas, an idea being an image formed in the mind) as such Islam is then viewed within the framework of what is usually known as a Hegelian (in reality Kantian) dialectic which holds the notion that history has been a battle of ideas, that a system of ideas is an inherently flawed thesis which by its very existence will bring about an anti-thesis thus creating a tension which will bring about a synthesis of thesis and anti-thesis and therefore an improved system of Ideas which will in-turn create another tension and synthesis and so on. This way of looking at things has in a sense driven some of the need of the RAND and others to create a Thesis of how Islam should be in the modern world in the hope that a synthesis will come about from tension created.

REMARKS

These are some of the points we need to take on board:

- *This report is not official policy although the RAND Corporation is very influential within the Bush administration with Condoleezza Rice being a former trustee and intern, Donald Rumsfeld being a former Chairman, Dr. Zalmay Mamozy Khalilzad (Current US Ambassador to the UN, and former US Ambassador to Iraq — term ended March 26, 2007, and husband of Cheryl Benard a Political Analyst for the RAND Corporation and one of the writers of the latest RAND report) was also an employee of the RAND Corporation. Dr. Khalilzad also wrote the influential monograph “From Containment to Global Leadership? America and the World after the Cold War”²³ while at RAND.*

22. Ibid., p. xiii.

23. Zalmay M. Khalilzad, “From Containment to Global Leadership? America and the World After the Cold War”, The RAND Corporation, 1995.

- The issue raised by the report regarding:

women's right of access to education and health services and right to full participation in the political process, including the right to hold political offices²⁴

there is still a problem with women accessing education and health services in many Muslim Societies due to the existence societal norms incongruent with the teachings of Islam being allowed to prevail over the teaching of Islam, there needs to be a strategy for the implementation of programs to put an end to this as this is distorting Islam both within and without, along with this there needs to be a clarification regarding the role of women in the political process.

- The Liberals are further ahead in working with the opportunities that the new landscape provides, this can even be seen in the impact they are having on the latest RAND report (examples such as Abdullahi An-Naim, Ulil Abshar Abdallah and his Liberal Muslim Network, former Muhammadiyah chairman Ahmad Syafii Maarif, and Tunisian modernist thinker Mohammed Charfi).
- Traditional Shari'ah authority has to provide alternative solutions to address the problems being raised (i.e. by answering the questions being raised by the liberals) by statements such as:

men and women and believers and unbelievers do not have equal rights under shari'a. In addition, due to the diversities of opinion in Islamic law, any enactment of shari'a principles as law would mean enforcing the political will of those in power, selecting some opinions over others, and thereby denying believers and others freedom of choice.²⁵

24. "Building Moderate Muslim Networks", p. 68.

25. Ibid., p. 67.

Or:

The name of “Liberal Islam” illustrate[s] our fundamental principles; Islam which emphasizes on “private liberties” (according to Mu’tazilah’s doctrine regarding “human liberties”), and “liberation” of socio-political structure from the unhealthy and oppressing domination. The “liberal” adjective has two meanings: “liberty” (being liberal) and “liberating.” Please note that we do not believe in Islam as such—Islam without any adjective as some people argued. Islam is impossible without adjective, in fact Islam [has] been interpreted in so many different ways in accordance to the interpreter’s need. We choose a genre of interpretation, and by this way, we selected an adjective for Islam, it is liberal.²⁶

Or the statement:

As noted Indonesian modernist and former Muhammadiyah chairman Ahmad Syafii Maarif points out, there is not a single verse in the Quran on the organization of the state.²⁷

Or the statement:

In Islam and Liberty: The Historical Misunderstanding, the noted Tunisian modernist thinker Mohammed Charfi argues that under Ummayyad and Abbasid rule Islamic law evolved in the context of an alliance between theologians and politicians. Although the law was dressed up as religion, it was written to suit the political needs of the rulers. At the time, the theory of the state was founded on authoritarianism, women were not equal under the law, and the legal system incorporated corporal punishments. These conditions existed everywhere else, Charfi argues, but others evolved and we didn’t.²⁸

26. Ibid., p. 72, a quote from Liberal Islam Network, “About Liberal Islam Network,” web page.

27. Ibid., p. 72. Author’s interview with Ahmad Syafii Maarif, Jakarta, June 2002.

28. Ibid., pp. 72-73.

- Liberal/ Progressive Islamic thinkers are asking the right questions (i.e. the questions being posed by our contemporary world), these questions should be taken seriously; the problem is they do not have the training or authentic methodology to arrive at authentic answers and the Scholars of Islam need to attempt to give these answers before any answers are picked out of the air and acted upon.
- With globalization and the exposure of communities across the globe the migration of ideas into Muslim Communities cannot be prevented indeed they challenge us and allow us an opportunity to look for answers and provide viable alternatives to the questions being posed.
- Traditional Scholars are in a unique position to offer viable alternatives and have the confidence of the public.

CONCLUDING REMARK

RAND's latest report advises the US government to work towards leveling the playing field so that alternatives to radicalization can be promoted within the Muslim Community. Whatever else will happen there will also be a space created for the dissemination of alternative ideas.