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WOOLSEY & MCCARTHY & SOYSTER: Second opinion needed on Shariah

Our political establishment wears blinders and ignores the threat

By R. James Woolsey, Andrew C. McCarthy and Harry E. Soyster - The Washington Times

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It is time for a “Team B” approach to Islamist ideology. The strategy has worked before, against a similarly determined threat to freedom. In 1976, George H.W. Bush, then director of central intelligence, invited a group of known skeptics about the strategy of detente to review the classified intelligence regarding Soviet intentions and capabilities. The point was to provide an informed second opinion on U.S. policy toward the Kremlin.

The conclusions of this experimental Team B study differed sharply from the government’s regnant theory. The skeptics found that, pursuant to its communist ideology, the Soviet Union was determined to secure the defeat of the United States and the West and to tyrannize the globe. Thus, not only was detente unlikely to succeed, but national-security policies undertaken in its pursuit exposed the nation to grave danger. The study was particularly persuasive to former California Gov. Ronald Reagan, who would use it not only to challenge the detentist policies of the Ford and Carter administrations but to build the strategy that ultimately brought down the “Evil Empire.”

Today, the United States faces a similarly insidious ideological threat: Shariah, the authoritarian doctrine that animates the Islamists and their jihadism. Translated as “the path,” Shariah is a comprehensive framework designed to govern all aspects of life. Though it certainly has spiritual elements, it would be a mistake to think of it as a “religious” code in the Western sense because it seeks to regulate all manner of behavior in the secular sphere - economic, social, military, legal and political. That regulation is oppressive, discriminatory, utterly inimical to our core constitutional liberties and destructive of equal protection under the law, especially for women.

We consequently have joined a group of security-policy practitioners and analysts in subjecting this ideology and its adherents to a new Team B study. Our assessment challenges bedrock assumptions of current American policy on combating (and minimizing) what the government calls “extremism” and on engaging (and appeasing) Shariah proponents who claim to reject terrorism. These



Illustration: Shariah sword

proponents are described, wrongly, as “moderates” because they appear content to achieve their patently immoderate designs through political-influence operations, “lawfare” and subversion. Participants in the study constitute a rich reservoir of national security experience drawn from military, intelligence, homeland security, law enforcement and academic backgrounds.

Our study does not perfectly replicate the Team B work of a generation ago. We have not been encouraged by our government, which, under administrations of both parties, has been immovably content to wear its blinders. Nor have we been invited to review classified information. These, however, have hardly been insuperable obstacles. What Americans need to know is ready to hand in the public record. The problem isn't access to information, it is coming to grips with what available information portends for our security.

Shariah is the crucial fault line of Islam's internecine struggle. On one side of the divide are Muslim reformers and authentic moderates - figures like Abdurrahman Wahid, the late president of Indonesia and leader of the world's largest liberal Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama - who embrace the Enlightenment's veneration of reason and, in particular, its separation of the spiritual and secular realms. On that side of the divide, Shariah is defined as but a reference point for a Muslim's personal conduct, not a corpus to be imposed on the life of a pluralistic society.

The other side of the divide is dominated by “Islamists,” who are Muslim supremacists. Like erstwhile proponents of communism and Nazism, these supremacists - some terrorists, others employing stealthier means - seek to impose a global theocratic and authoritarian regime, called a caliphate. On this side of the divide, Shariah is a compulsory system that Muslims are obliged to wage jihad to install and to which the rest of the world is required to submit.

For these ideologues, Shariah is not a private matter. They see the West as an infidel enemy to be conquered, not a culture and civilization to be embraced or at least tolerated. It is impossible, they maintain, for alternative legal systems and forms of government like ours to coexist peacefully with the end-state they seek.

It is not the burden of our study to broker competing claims about which side of the Shariah divide represents the “true Islam.” There are approximately 1.4 billion Muslims in the world, and their understandings about their belief system, as well as their practices with respect to it, vary widely. There may not be a single “true Islam.” If there is one, we do not presume to pronounce what it holds.

What cannot be denied credibly, however, is that Shariah is firmly rooted in Islam's doctrinal texts, and it is favored by influential Islamic commentators, institutions, traditions and academic centers. For more than a half-century, moreover, Shariah Islam has been financed lavishly and propagated by Islamic governmental entities (particularly Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Organization of the Islamic Conference) through the offices of disciplined international organizations, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood. We know from an internal 1991 memorandum authored by one of the Brotherhood's U.S. leaders that its mission is a “grand jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and ‘sabotaging’ its miserable house.”

Consequently, we need to come to grips with Shariah. Whether pursued through violent jihad or the stealthier techniques the Brotherhood calls “civilization jihad” or dawa (the call to Islam), Shariah rejects

fundamental premises of constitutional governance and American society: the bedrock proposition that the governed have a right to make law for themselves irrespective of any theocratic code; the republican democracy guaranteed by the Constitution; freedom of conscience; individual liberty (including in matters of personal privacy and sexual preference); freedom of expression (including the liberty to analyze and criticize theocratic codes and practices); economic liberty (including private property); equality (including equality of men and women and of Muslims and non-Muslims); freedom from cruel and unusual punishments; an unequivocal condemnation of terrorism (one that does not rationalize barbarity as legitimate “resistance”); and an abiding commitment to deflate and resolve political controversies by the ordinary mechanisms of federalism and democracy, not wanton violence.

Trial evidence has shown, most recently in the terrorism-financing prosecution against an ostensible Islamic “charity” known as the Holy Land Foundation, that Shariah adherents - including a network of Muslim Brotherhood-connected organizations operating in the United States - are seriously pursuing civilization jihad in this country. Their agenda is about power, not faith, and therefore must not be confused with a constitutionally protected form of religious practice. Shariah’s ambitions transcend what American law recognizes as the sacrosanct realm of private conscience and belief. It seeks to supplant our Constitution with its own authoritarian framework.

Sometimes the Brotherhood and its friends are supportive of Islamist terrorism, particularly against Israel and against American operations in Islamic countries. Sometimes they strategically condemn terrorist methods (although they are careful to refrain from condemning specific terrorist groups and to blame America for their behavior). In either event, however, the endgame of Islamist ideology is the same whether pursued by terrorists or nonviolent activists: to extort American society into Shariah compliance.

It is vital to the national security of the United States that we do what we can to empower Islam’s authentic moderates and reformers. That cannot be done by following the failed strategy of fictionalizing the state of Islam in the vain hope that reality will, at some point, catch up to the benign fable of a thriving moderate Islam beset by a mere handful of aberrant “extremists.” Empowering the real moderates requires a candid recognition of the faux moderates and the strength of their Shariah agenda, just as defeat of 20th-century totalitarian ideologies required a gimlet-eyed appreciation of their malevolent capabilities.

The definition of “moderation” needs to be reset, to bore in on the Shariah fault line. Only by identifying those Muslims who wish to impose Shariah can we succeed in marginalizing them. As our study manifests, the Shariah system is utterly anti-American. Those obliged to defend the proposition that it should be adopted here will find few takers and, quite properly, be seen for what they are in the West: marginal and extremist figures. That, and only that, will strengthen true proponents of a moderate or reformist Islam that embraces freedom and equality.

Most important, we must protect our way of life regardless of the ultimate resolution of Islam’s internal strife. We can do a far better job of empowering non-Shariah-adherent Muslims who are our natural allies, but we cannot win for them - they have to do that for themselves. Irrespective of whether they succeed in the herculean task of delegitimizing Shariah globally, we must face it down in the United States, throughout the West and wherever on Earth it launches violent or ideological offensives against us.

If we are to face down Shariah, however, we must understand what we are up against, not simply hope that dialogue and “engagement” will make the challenge go away. The brute fact is that Shariah adherents

perforce support objectives that are incompatible with the U.S. Constitution, the civil rights it guarantees and the representative government it authorizes. Our security depends on confronting them, not sitting silent as they gradually efface our liberties.

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