

daunting nature of the challenges we face and the long-term effort to restore American power and influence in the post-Iraq era. ▀

Rejoin the Battle of Ideas

Will Marshall

Come what may in Iraq, the next president's top priority will be regaining the moral and ideological initiative against Islamist extremism. In the crucial battle of ideas, President George W. Bush's inept handling of present conflicts has given radical Islam a second wind and thrown America on the defensive. In fact, the president's mistakes in Iraq and elsewhere have resulted in a bizarre moral inversion: Only six years after losing nearly 3,000 people in a single morning to jihadist terrorism, America is now widely regarded not as a principled champion of human rights and democracy, nor even as a nation sensibly acting in its own self-defense, but rather as an occupier and aggressor.

Our inability to stabilize Iraq feeds this impression, but so does the way Bush frames the broader conflict against jihadism. For too many Muslims, his "war on terror" has morphed into a war on Islam. The Administration's excessively martial policies and rhetoric play into the hands of Osama bin Laden, who invokes the specter of a new crusade against Islam to radicalize Muslim opinion.

To counter the Islamist surge, we need a more precise definition of the conflict. As Reza Aslan, a scholar of politics and religion in the Middle East, argues, "The United States has not so much launched a war against Islamic terrorism as joined a war already in progress." This is a struggle for Islam's soul, and therefore not one that America can "win." On one side are Salafi zealots who promise to restore Islam's glory by violently purging Muslim societies of modern ideas and erasing all boundaries between politics and religion. On the other is a Muslim mainstream striving peacefully to reconcile Islam and modernity. Unfolding amid a general revival of Islamic fervor and identity, this contest is mainly for Muslims to decide. Yet America cannot safely disengage from the conflict. On the contrary, our country (and Europe too) has an enormous stake in the outcome. In the wake of the Iraq debacle, we need a new strategy for tipping the scales toward Muslim moderates and modernizers.

Stretching from Morocco to Pakistan, the greater Middle East is to the early twenty-first century what Europe was to the twentieth: the world's crucible of ideological militancy and war. Radical Islam has arisen here in response to a tangle

WILL MARSHALL *is the president of the Progressive Policy Institute.*

of pathologies, including unpopular governments whose competence is confined to repression; stagnant, command economies; sectarian and tribal divisions; and anger over what many see as the Muslim world's humiliating weakness.

Amid the mounting turmoil, it should be obvious even to the most doctrinaire realist that the United States cannot simply return to its 60-year policy of supporting "moderate" autocracies in the name of stability. Corrupt and oppressive, haunted by the failures of socialism and Arab nationalism, and seemingly impervious to reform, the Middle East's post-colonial order is breaking down. It makes no strategic sense for the United States to prop up this rotten status quo; on the contrary, such a course would only reinforce a jihadist narrative that has America talking democracy while practicing imperialism. Besides, Washington can't have it both ways. We can't defeat jihadist terrorism by embracing the

In the wake of the Iraq debacle, we need a new strategy for tipping the scales toward Muslim moderates and modernizers.

very regimes whose mis-governance, corruption, and outward deflection of extremist energies feed it. Our security now depends, as never before, on change in the Middle East.

With this paradigmatic shift in mind, our next president must do three things to put America back on the ideological offensive against radical Islam: First,

rebuild America's moral credibility, which will drain the jihadist narrative of much of its potency. Second, support Muslim reformers who reject intimidation and violence. Third, marginalize Islamist extremists by stigmatizing their ideas and their methods.

We should start by putting our own house in order. That means unequivocally banning torture, closing the prison at Guantanamo Bay, and junking the "Cheney Doctrine," which holds that U.S. presidents can make up their own rules for detaining, interrogating, and trying terrorist suspects without regard to domestic or international law. These policies, by belying America's reputation as a liberal champion of the rule of law, make us weaker, not stronger. They have handed our enemies a propaganda windfall and made it harder to win our friends' cooperation on counterterrorism. By realigning U.S. security policy and our liberal values, we can gradually rebuild trust in American leadership and shift the moral onus in this conflict where it belongs—to the devotees of a jihadist death cult who murder innocents in Islam's name.

Second, Washington should use the neglected tools of American statecraft, especially economic strength and public diplomacy, to back Muslim moderates struggling to modernize their societies. As the Arab U.N. Development Report

of 2005 makes amply clear, the Muslim world's lagging economic development is an incubator of extremism. Once the great crossroads of trade connecting Europe and the Orient, the Arab world is now a conspicuous outlier in the global economy. As the Progressive Policy Institute's Ed Gresser has documented, its share of world trade and investment plummeted 75 percent between 1980 and 2000, even as its population has nearly doubled. The entire region attracts about as much foreign direct investment each year as Sweden. It's easier to reject modernity if you enjoy few of its benefits, so a new U.S. strategy should use our economic power to help Muslims improve their economic prospects.

That's why we need a large-scale, Middle East Prosperity Plan aimed at opening the region's economies, lowering barriers to trade and investment, and integrating the Middle East into global markets. This would not be just a massive infusion of aid, but a strong push to stimulate trade and investment and break the Arab and Muslim heartland out of its economic isolation. Granted, economic growth and development won't magically "cure" extremism. But spreading the tangible benefits of prosperity to the Middle East can help the West deepen ties of mutual interest in the region, temper the perceived injustice of economic globalization, and open new avenues of opportunity to aimless young men who otherwise might be tempted to sign up for global jihad.

Helping Muslims build more responsive and accountable political institutions is another way to undercut the allure of jihadist insurrection. Unfortunately, Bush has set back the cause of Middle East democracy by conflating it with the Iraq war. And recent electoral gains by Islamists in Iran, Lebanon, and especially the Palestinian territories have fed fears that democracy may be spreading extremism instead of curbing it. But as Shadi Hamid of the Project on Middle East Democracy has argued in these pages ["Parting the Veil," Issue #5], the United States should not rule out the possibility of finding allies for political reform in mainstream Islamist parties, like Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, that have renounced violence. While such parties are rarely paragons of liberalism, they are challenging regimes widely seen as corrupt and unjust. They are also anathema to Al Qaeda, which considers democracy a form of idolatry punishable by death. Backing the Islamic parties' right to compete for power could align America with popular aspirations and open space for genuine political competition and pluralism.

The next president must also revive America's moribund institutions for public diplomacy. Washington spends upwards of \$400 billion each year on the military but a paltry \$1.5 billion on public diplomacy. This is no way to win a battle of ideas. How can we counter the arguments of Islamist extremists when, according to a 2005 study of public diplomacy, the State Department

had only five Arabic speakers capable of appearing on Arab television? Beyond ramping up attendance at language schools, we also should recruit a corps of Muslim-American volunteers to tell America's story around the Muslim world. A landmark poll by the Pew Research Center found that U.S. Muslims are well-assimilated, on average well-educated and prosperous, and satisfied with the way their lives are going. They are, in short, uniquely qualified to testify to the essential compatibility between Islamic faith and culture and liberal democracy. America needs these credible interlocutors who can debate, challenge, and reason with Muslims—preferably in their own language.

Finally, given America's diminished moral stature in the Muslim world, we should work with Europe and other great powers to marshal the legitimating force of international agreements and institutions to stigmatize terrorism. For example, we should push for a new international anti-terrorism treaty that outlaws all acts of violence against noncombatants—with no exceptions for “resistance” to occupation. The next president should lift the administration's pigheaded bar on U.S. participation in the International Criminal Court and ask that body to indict Al Qaeda and other terrorist leaders for crimes against humanity.

The civil war raging today within Islam is not ours to win or lose. But America can help to tip history's scales by standing alongside those who are willing to take a stand against fanaticism and terror. ▀

Engage Iran

Suzanne Maloney & Ray Takeyh

We may not leave Baghdad with Iraqis scrambling to the roof of our billion-dollar embassy and clinging to the struts of departing American helicopters, but we will likely bequeath a state incapable of protecting its people or defending its borders against even today's threats. Ultimately, Iraq's democratic edifice, erected at such great cost, will likely crumble from a combination of internal and external pressures, and whatever succeeds it will surely be even less appealing for the United States and for Iraq's neighbors. We will face a profusion of trigger points and potential dangers from actors inside

SUZANNE MALONEY, *a senior fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, was a member of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff from June 2005 until May 2007.* RAY TAKEYH, *author of Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic, is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.*