

## FUNDAMENTALISM AND CONFLICT

As the US and its allies remake the map of the Middle East through their occupation in Afghanistan and Iraq and begin the long transition of these countries from dictatorships to representative systems it is necessary to keep in mind that as with Asia there is a lack of homogeneity in describing the Islamic world. As B. Lewis and other experts attest, the terms 'Arab', 'Muslim' and 'Islam' do not denote necessarily similar concepts nor are they accurate terms to describe a system of religion stretching over a wide geographical area from North Africa eastwards to the Philippines. Islam and its Sunni variant (Wahabbi) of extremism have encouraged some analysts to view the entire Arab world as hostile to Western interests. It is very difficult to persuasively argue that Pan-Arabism, Arab nationalism, or Sunni or Shi'ite Muslim doctrine comprises one monolithic Arabic entity. Even militant Islam is not homogenous, not a regional association nor is it confined to certain borders nor is it even a singular religious construct.<sup>490</sup>

Fundamentalist and extremist Islam does not meet any of the criteria as outlined earlier, to be labelled as a regional entity. Nevertheless its explosive violence throughout North Africa, the Near East, central Asia and especially against a democratic and prosperous Israel is a variant of regional and local non conformity to Western inspired globalization and as such needs to be treated if not as an IPE entity, at least as a regional movement of import and power that confronts globalization and is inimically hostile to Western interests.<sup>491</sup>

Militant Islam is a non-territorially confined transnational expression of anti-universality, predicated upon social mores and values hostile to universality and non-Islamic initiated processes.<sup>492</sup> It is in large measure anti-Jewish and anti-American and it is difficult to believe that any form of rational peace making shall still its expression and more radical fundamentalist supporters. Given its irrationality Islamic fundamentalism has often been regarded as a major threat to the regional stability of the Middle East and to Western interests in the broader Muslim world. Problems with Iraq, September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the Iranian revolution attacks, attacks on Western embassies,

hijackings, hostage taking, and violent acts against Israel, have signalled a militant Islam in open war with the West. Uprisings in the former Soviet Union's Muslim areas, Kosovo, Kashmir, Sinkiang China, the West Bank, Gaza, and Hussein's thwarted attempt to conquer Kuwait all signify a violent and explosive fundamentalism whose systemic development is inimical to any form of Western oriented regionalism or globalism.

Iraq, and Al Qaeda in particular and most other militant terrorist networks in general, generate almost as much fear in Arab elites and governments as they do in Israel or the United States. Growing populations, failed economies and societies and strict authoritarianism provide fertile ground to breed anti-US and Western sentiment. Bin Laden might be alive or dead, but most experts suggest that his organisation Al Qaeda now has 3,000 operatives in the Arab world actively recruiting new members and pursuing plans in prosecuting the war with America. By attacking the US Bin Laden and his associates hope to topple the pro-Western regimes in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. Al Qaeda has therefore used the Palestinian conflict as a convenient propaganda tool to further generate anti-Western feeling within the Arab and Muslim world. A Palestinian homeland was never a central concern of Al Qaeda but its emotive power contributes to its overall purpose of fomenting anti-US feeling with the average Arab and Muslim citizen. This effort to win over public opinion within the Arab and Muslim world as well as fight a dispersed terrorist network such as Al Qaeda lends credence to the American viewpoint that such a conflict must last for years. Such a war is further complicated by a lack of a true 'Arab' or 'Muslim' entity and a large heterogeneous population spread over a vast part of the globe.

The Islamic faith in all its variants constitutes a pervasive transnational power in the world with 1.2 billion adherents spread across the globe. Muslims constitute a majority in 56 nations and they are growing to significant mass in the USA, Russia and Europe. Islamic extremism threatens the stability of pro-Western regimes in Morocco, Jordan and Pakistan. All Western nation states have been suffused with militant Islam supporters many operating cells and engaged in the active financial support of militant groups in their home