



JE KINDLE-NOTITIES VOOR:

Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam (American Empire Project)

door Robert Dreyfuss

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41 Highlights

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In the 1950s, the enemy was not only Moscow but the Third World's emerging nationalists, from Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt to Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran. The United States and Britain used the Muslim Brotherhood, a terrorist movement and the grandfather organization of the Islamic right, against Nasser, the up-and-coming leader of the Arab nationalists. In the CIA-sponsored coup d'état in Iran in 1953, the United States secretly funded an ayatollah who had founded the Devotees of Islam, a fanatical Iranian ally of the Muslim Brotherhood. Later in the same decade, the United States began to toy with the notion of an Islamic bloc led by Saudi Arabia as a counterpoint to the nationalist left.

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In the 1960s, despite U.S. efforts to contain it, left-wing nationalism and Arab socialism spread from Egypt to Algeria to Syria, Iraq, and Palestine. To counter this seeming threat, the United States forged a working alliance with Saudi Arabia, intent on using its foreign-policy arm, Wahhabi fundamentalism. The United States joined with King Saud and Prince Faisal (later, King Faisal) in pursuit of an Islamic bloc from North Africa to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia founded institutions to mobilize the Wahhabi religious right and the Muslim Brotherhood. Saudi-backed activists founded the Islamic Center of Geneva (1961), the Muslim World League (1962), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (1969), and other organizations that formed the core of an international Islamist movement.

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Afghani, the founder of pan-Islam, is the great-great-grandfather of Osama bin Laden—not biologically, but in ideological terms. Were we to construct a biblical genealogy of right-wing Islamism, it would read like this: Afghani (1838–1897) begat Mohammed Abduh (1849–1905), an Egyptian pan-Islamic activist who was Afghani's chief disciple and who helped spread Afghani's message. Abduh begat Mohammed Rashid Rida (1865–1935), a Syrian disciple of Abduh's, who moved to Egypt and founded a magazine, The Lighthouse, to advocate Abduh's ideas in support of a system of Islamic republics. Rashid Rida begat Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949), who learned Islamism from Rashid Rida's The Lighthouse, and who founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928. Banna begat many offspring. Among them were his son-in-law, Said Ramadan, the Muslim Brotherhood's international organizer, whose headquarters were in Switzerland, and Abul-Ala Mawdudi, the founder of the Islamic Group in Pakistan, the first Islamist political party, who was inspired by Banna's work.

Banna's other heirs set up branches of the Brotherhood in every Muslim state, in Europe, and in the United States. Another of Banna's offspring, a Saudi who took part in America's Afghan jihad, was Al Qaeda's Osama bin Laden, the family's blackest sheep.

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In the half century between 1875 and 1925, the building blocks of the Islamic right were cemented in place by the British empire. Afghani created the intellectual foundation for a pan-Islamic movement—with British patronage and the support of England's leading Orientalist, E. G. Browne. Abduh, Afghani's chief disciple, founded, with the help of London's Egyptian proconsul, Evelyn Baring Lord Cromer, the Salafiyya movement, the radical-right, back-to-basics fundamentalist current that still exists today. To understand the proper role of Afghani and Abduh, it is important to see them as experiments in a century-long British effort to organize a pro-British pan-Islamic movement.

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Afghani, a quixotic and slippery ally, shopped his services to other imperial powers, and ultimately his mystical, semi-modernist version of fundamentalist Islam failed to rise to the level of a mass movement. Abduh, his chief disciple, attached himself more firmly to the British rulers of Egypt and created the cornerstone of the Muslim Brotherhood, which dominated the Islamic right throughout the twentieth century. The British backed Abduh even as they launched two other pre-World War I schemes to mobilize Islamic fervor. In the Arabian Peninsula, the British helped a desert band of ultra-fundamentalist Arabs, led by the family of Ibn Saud, create the world's first Islamic fundamentalist state in Saudi Arabia. At the same time, they encouraged the Hashemites of Mecca, a second Arabian family with a spurious claim to be descended from the original prophet of Islam, whose sons London installed as kings of Iraq and Jordan.

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Abdul Wahhab's most important convert was the founder of the Al Saud dynasty, Mohammed ibn Saud. Ibn Saud apparently saw himself as an eighteenth-century version of the Prophet Mohammed, conquering lands for Islam and imposing his faith on the conquered. To reinforce their message, Abdul Wahhab, Ibn Saud, and their followers had the unfortunate habit of slaughtering anyone who disagreed with them and demolishing their cities, their mosques, and their shrines.

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Joining forces with the Al Saud, the Wahhabis assembled a mighty army of followers, who spent centuries wreaking havoc across Arab territory. They were, in the words of a nineteenth-century English writer, notorious for "preferring slaughter to booty" in their conquests.³⁸ The slaughter never ended. In the 1700s, the Saud-Wahhabi alliance began a "campaign of killing and plunder all across Arabia," first in central Arabia, then in Asir in southern Arabia and parts of Yemen, and finally in Riyadh and the Hijaz.³⁹ In 1802 they raided the Shiite holy city of Karbala in what is now Iraq, killing most of the city's population, destroying the dome over the grave of a founder of Shiism, and looting "property, weapons, clothing, carpets, gold, silver, [and] precious copies of the Quran."⁴⁰ In fact, Wahhabism would be weirdly marked by a "signature activity of dome

demolition.”⁴¹ Domes in Mecca, too, would be destroyed in the early part of the nineteenth century. (It is a practice that continues today. In the former Yugoslavia, Saudi Arabia would demand radical changes in Islamic sites. “Saudi aid agencies,” wrote John Esposito, “have been responsible for the destruction or reconstruction of many historic mosques, libraries, Quran schools, and cemeteries in Bosnia and Kosovo because their Ottoman architecture, decorations, frescoes, and tombstones did not conform to Wahhabi iconoclastic aesthetics.

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In both cases—the Al Saud and the Hashemites—the British sought to mobilize Islam. The Hashemites boasted that their family was directly descended from that of the Prophet Mohammed, a claim made by any number of scurrilous would-be rulers in the past century. The British, naturally, saw the Hashemites as potential claimants to a new, and pro-British, caliphate based in Mecca. The Al Saud, propelled by the warriors of Wahhabism, were a formidable Islamic strike force that, the British believed, would help London gain control of the western shores of the Persian Gulf.

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Anwar Sadat, the future Egyptian president, was a key member of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1940s. During World War II he was associated with a loosely organized movement of junior officers that, in 1949, was formally established by Nasser as the Egyptian Free Officers in the wake of the Palestine war and who seized power from the king in 1952. The Free Officers included men from a wide variety of ideologies, from communists and left-wing nationalists to Wafdists and members of the Muslim Brotherhood, all united in their belief that Farouq was hopelessly corrupt and servile. England’s imperious treatment of Farouq during the war by British ambassador Miles Lampson—who reportedly²⁵ called the young Farouq “boy” to his face—had enraged them, and they maintained contact with one another in the postwar years.

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But was Banna recruiting members for the Free Officers—or infiltrating it? It isn’t clear. The Brotherhood was more than a movement. It was a cult, it was a revivalist party, it was an intelligence operation, it was a paramilitary unit, and it was an international organization that was rapidly building branches in many Middle East countries. What is clear is that during the 1940s, the British, the Nazis, and the Soviets had thoroughly penetrated the Brotherhood. In the 1930s, many right-wing Arab nationalists and many on the Islamic right, including the Brotherhood, found succor and support in ties to German Nazi intelligence.

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FDR’s 1943 proclamation that America would defend Saudi Arabia would be reaffirmed by every American president, most prominently in the 1957 Eisenhower Doctrine and the 1980 Carter Doctrine. In 1944, the United States sent its first military mission to Saudi Arabia, and in 1945 the United States and Saudi Arabia signed a military cooperation agreement that established a major U.S. Air Force base at Dhahran in the Persian Gulf, a facility that would serve as an American base until the 1960s. That agreement was quickly followed by a 1949 accord, which provided for a U.S. survey team to cover the entire Arabian peninsula, with recommendations for creating a U.S.-equipped, 43,000-man army and air force, and a 1951 accord setting up a permanent U.S. Military Training Mission in the country.¹⁷

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From the beginning, America's relationship with Saudi Arabia was a no-nonsense one, involving a rapidly expanding oil output, bilateral defense arrangements, and a vast influx of Texans, Oklahomans, and Louisianans into the kingdom. The United States, joined by Great Britain as a rival and junior partner, began to surround Saudi Arabia with military alliances. In 1951, the United States and Britain proposed a "Middle East Command," linking the United States, the United Kingdom, and France with Turkey, Israel, and Jordan.

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The president's visitor that September day was Said Ramadan, a militant official and ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood. The young man even had a claim to semi-royalty in Brotherhood circles, since he had married Wafa al-Banna, Hassan al-Banna's daughter, making him the son-in-law of the organization's founder. As he stood at the president's side, Ramadan appeared respectable and harmless.

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Yet the Brotherhood was known throughout the Middle East, since at least the late 1940s, as an organization of fanatics and terrorists. Its acolytes had murdered several Egyptian officials, including a prime minister, and just five years before Ramadan met Ike, the Muslim Brotherhood was declared illegal by the faltering regime of King Farouq of Egypt. But it didn't disappear. Over the next fifty years, the Muslim Brotherhood would stage repeated comebacks, slowly building its power and influence, spreading its ideology and building chapters in Jordan, Syria, Kuwait, and beyond. And until his death, in Switzerland, in 1995, Said Ramadan would be its chief international organizer.

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According to declassified documents in the Swiss archives, reported by Sylvain Besson in *Le Temps* of Geneva, in the 1960s the Swiss authorities—then hosting Ramadan at his Islamic Center in Geneva—looked upon Ramadan favorably, thanks to his anti-communist views. And they added: "Said Ramadan is, among other things, an intelligence agent of the English and the Americans. What's more, I believe that he has rendered services—according to an intelligence plan—to the [Swiss federal police]." Ramadan's dossier, reported *Le Temps*, includes several documents indicating his connections to "certain Western secret services."³⁵ ISLAM: BULWARK AGAINST COMMUNISM?

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To help round up the Muslim Brotherhood's leading lights, Nasser played a secret card, using a jujitsu-like maneuver against a clique of former Nazis who had taken roost in Egypt after World War II. During the war, many right-wing Islamists and Brotherhood activists—including Haj Amin al-Husseini, the mufti of Jerusalem, who had settled in Cairo—had intimate ties to the Nazis and to German intelligence. After the war, many former Nazis who escaped the Nuremberg trials and other dragnets fled to safe havens around the world, and Egypt in the 1940s was particularly welcoming. By then, the CIA and MI6 were fast recruiting former Nazis to the Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union. Working with Reinhard Gehlen, the former Nazi intelligence chief, the

CIA and the U.S. army helped to set up the famous Gehlen Organization, the association of ex-Nazi spies that was used by James Critchfield of the CIA as the core of the West German intelligence system. Some of them, no doubt, infiltrated Egypt on behalf of either U.S. or British intelligence; others were simply migrating to what they hoped was a hospitable environment.

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The shah himself, in memoirs written just before his death in exile, notes that the man who killed his minister of court in 1950, Fakhr Arai, had ties both to the Devotees of Islam and to the British. "Arai was involved with an ultraconservative religious group that was comprised of the most backward religious fanatics," he wrote, adding that he may also have had indirect ties to the British embassy in Teheran. "The British had their fingers in strange pies. The British had ties to the most reactionary clergy in the country."³⁴

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More interesting, for our story, is the role of Mohammed Sorour Sabhan. Sorour was the freed slave who, while serving as Saudi Arabia's deputy finance minister in the late 1940s, was the Saudi paymaster for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In the 1950s, Sorour had become minister of finance and one of King Saud's closest advisers. In the 1960s, he would assume a powerful position overseeing Saudi Arabia's worldwide effort to promote the Muslim Brotherhood and other radical Muslim fundamentalist groups, from Africa to Indonesia. It isn't known if at all, or to what extent, Sorour and Dulles discussed the Brotherhood. But in supporting an alliance with Saudi Arabia, then the Brotherhood's chief financial supporter, the United States was in fact enlisting the Brothers in the Cold War.

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But the Kennedy-Nasser duet faltered, and ultimately failed. In September 1962, pro-Nasser forces overthrew the medieval government of Yemen, which occupied a crucial piece of real estate strategically positioned on the southern flank of Saudi Arabia astride the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. At the time, Kennedy said, "I don't even know where it is."⁴⁸ The leader of Yemen in 1962 was Imam Ahmad, a decrepit, 300-pound autocrat with a reputation for brutality. He thought of himself as the "protector of God's religion," and he denounced Nasser's economic program as "un-Islamic."⁴⁹ When he died, rebels backed by Nasser overthrew his equally reactionary son, Mohammed al-Badr. According to Seelye, Nasser "was behind the overthrow of the regime, and Saudi Arabia was very, very upset."⁵⁰ The revolution in Yemen, soon backed by the arrival of thousands of Egyptian troops, posed a threat to the very existence of Saudi Arabia. Robert Komer, the White House aide for Middle East policy, warned Kennedy, "The House of Saud well knows it could be next."⁵¹ Saudi Arabia, alarmed, lent arms and money to the Yemeni monarchists. The subsequent war left 200,000 dead in nearly a decade of fighting.

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The U.S. support for Saudi Arabia tacitly backed a vast international effort by King Faisal to rally Muslim support in the Cold War. In 1965, Faisal began a frenetic tour of Muslim countries to find allies, describing Marxism as "a subversive creed originated by a vile Jew."⁶⁰ He was ever more determined to stamp it out. He

joined the shah in calling for a grand Islamic alliance, and visited Jordan, Sudan, Pakistan, Turkey, Morocco, Guinea, and Mali in 1966 to drum up support. In Jordan, he wailed that “the powers of evil have planned to fight Islam and Muslims wherever they are” and are “trying to kill every sign of Islamic influence.”⁶¹ In Sudan, he proclaimed: “As for the communists, they are attacking us because the Islamic movement is going to destroy all that communism stands for, in particular, disbelief in the Almighty God.” Noting that the USSR contained Muslim territories, he added: “The Communists fear the expansion of our movement because it will reach the Islamic territories that have fallen under their oppressive domination.”⁶² In Pakistan, he issued a clarion call for an Islamic bloc despite the fact that Islam “is facing many undercurrents that are pulling Moslems left and right.”⁶³ Pakistan, a right-wing Islamic state that was part of two formal alliances with the West, sent troops to stabilize Saudi Arabia from both internal and external threats. Beginning in the early 1960s, Pakistani army officers had taken up posts in Saudi Arabia’s armed forces, as trainers and commanders. One of them was General Zia ul-Haq, who in 1977 would mount an Islamist coup d’état against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.⁶⁴

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THE 1970s, guided by Kamal Adham, Saudi Arabia’s chief of intelligence, Anwar Sadat brought the Muslim Brotherhood back to Egypt. The United States, accustomed to working with Saudi Arabia, was untroubled by the rise of Islamism in Egypt. In fact, Washington was so eager to work with Anwar Sadat to bring Egypt over to the U.S. side in the Cold War that policy makers, diplomats, and intelligence officers viewed Sadat’s restoration of the Islamic right benignly or tacitly encouraged it. But Sadat had opened a Pandora’s box. Once freed, the Brotherhood knew no bounds. Back in their ancestral home, the Brothers worked feverishly to spread their influence worldwide. The consequences were profound, and deadly—not least for the Egyptian president himself. Concurrent with the growth of the Islamic right in Egypt, Sadat helped engineer a dramatic expansion of America’s power in the Middle East. Under Nasser, Egypt was a nation at odds with the United States.

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People who traveled even casually to Egypt during the 1970s were struck by this thorough transformation. In the schools, in the streets, in the mosques, in the press, there were manifestations of the growing presence of Islamic fundamentalism. Michael Dunn, editor of the Middle East Journal, says that he could not help but be amazed by the shift during the mid-1970s. “In Egypt things changed dramatically,” he says. “People were wearing beards everywhere. There were things called Muslim Brotherhood magazines or newspapers. People were wearing white djellabas. The mosques were overflowing, with people spilling out into the streets.”³ Students flocked to join Islamist groups, and thousands of new mosques were constructed. Muslim Brotherhood-linked banks and businesses sprouted, and phalanxes of Islamist thugs emerged to intimidate political opponents. But for Sadat, it was a fatal embrace.

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An astute observer of that period, Abdel Moneim Said, director of Egypt’s Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, says that the influence of Saudi Arabia in Egypt during the early 1970s was pervasive. Many Egyptians went to work in Saudi Arabia, and returned having imbibed conservative, Wahhabi theology, he says. Saudi Arabia also lavishly funded Egyptian institutions, desperate for funding. “It moved Al Azhar to the right, and to publish extremely conservative views. Many Saudi Arabian NGOs donated money to Egyptian mosques,

and that was also moving them to the right,” says Said. “And many Egyptian journalists were on the Saudi payroll, secretly, of course.”

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Perhaps the most important of the FIBE Muslim Brotherhood founders is Youssef Nada. Nada, one of the original, pre-Nasser members of the Brotherhood, was implicated in a 1954 assassination attempt against the Egyptian leader, and like Said Ramadan, Nada escaped Egypt, fleeing to Germany and then to Italy. Along with other Muslim Brotherhood veterans, Nada helped found the Bank Al Taqwa (“Fear of God”), with centers in the Bahamas, Italy, and Switzerland. Al Taqwa is seen as the Muslim Brotherhood’s semiofficial bank. Abdelkader Shoheib, an Egyptian journalist who spent years following Nada, observes, “Initially, A.T. Bank was conceived as a central economic instrument of the Muslim Brotherhood, in particular its international branch.” The international branch was long associated with Said Ramadan, who is the son-in-law of Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Geneva, and who founded the Islamic Center in Geneva, Switzerland. Al Taqwa was “directed by Youssef Nada,” said Shoheib.⁴⁷ A confidential list of Bank Al Taqwa’s founders included leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria and Tunisia, along with Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who served as “president of A.T.’s office of religious affairs.”⁴⁸ Many of those connected to the FIBE-Taqwa circles would later turn up in the investigation of Al Qaeda and its allies. In 2001, Nada was designated by the U.S. Department of the Treasury as a terrorist financier.⁴⁹ FIBE’s connection to radical Islamists

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The big banks were already major players with Saudi and Arab Gulf conventional bankers, so when the Islamic banking movement emerged it seemed too good an opportunity to miss. Major Western banks and financial institutions pitched in to provide expertise, training, and the latest banking technology to facilitate the explosion of Islamic-right banking power. Reassured by Orientalists and academics who asserted that Islam’s commitment to capitalism went back to Mohammed, the big money center banks plunged in. Major participants included Citibank; the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation; Bankers Trust; Chase Manhattan; the disciples of the University of Chicago’s Milton Friedman; the International Monetary Fund; Price Waterhouse; U.S., British, and Swiss technicians; the major oil companies; Harvard University; and the University of Southern California; among others. Creating a banking system that didn’t charge interest, and yet still could function both legally and efficiently in the world of global finance, was no mean trick. It is beyond the scope of this book to discuss the theory of Islamic finance, and the mechanisms that allowed non-interest “lenders” to recoup their “loans” and still make a profit. Suffice it to say that a complex and multilayered theory of exactly how to do just that developed in the 1970s.¹ More important, for our story, is how these banks propelled the growth of political Islam, with the connivance of Western bankers. Ibrahim Warde, one of the keenest observers of the world of Islamic finance concludes: The international banking system was ... instrumental in the very creation of Islamic banks. The fledgling Islamic banks, lacking experience and resources, had little choice but to rely on the expertise of their international counterparts. And as Islamic banks gained experience, the world of finance was undergoing major transformations. So rather than being phased out, the cooperation with Western banks—in the form of joint ventures, management agreements, technical cooperation and correspondent banking—was stepped up, leading to increased convergence and fusion between conventional and Islamic finance.”² Some of the groundbreaking work on the development of a theory of Islamic banking, including how to organize a modern bank using non-interest-bearing securities, was being done in Pakistan, in London, and, in the 1960s, at the

University of Chicago, by the economist Lloyd Metzler.³ By the 1970s, when petro-Islam took off, they were ready.

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What excited Western free-market gurus was the notion that by its nature Islam was a capitalist religion. Mohammed, the Prophet, was a capitalist and profit-seeking trader who believed in free markets, low taxes, private enterprise, and the absence of regulations, and his early Islamic regime in Mecca obeyed rules that would make a neo-liberal economist smile—or at least that is the portrait painted by Islamic fundamentalists and by free-market ideologues from the West.

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Perhaps to curry favor with conservative Saudi Islamists and Wahhabi-influenced members of the royal family, the Brotherhood attacked the PLO for its irreligious outlook. The Brotherhood said that the PLO “does not serve God,” and Yassin declared: “The PLO is secularist. It cannot be accepted as a representative unless it becomes Islamic.”¹⁹ At the time, it seemed unlikely that the Muslim Brotherhood would gain much of a foothold among Palestinians. First of all, many Palestinians were Christian, and would have no truck with an organization pledged to create an Islamic state. Palestinians were also among the Arab world’s most modern, educated, and Westernized populations, and as a diaspora they were well traveled and well connected throughout the Arab world, the United States, and Europe, not to mention the USSR. Above all, they were nationalists. On the other hand, the very nature of the Palestinian Islamists was to oppose nationalism, and to oppose the creation of a state of Palestine, instead focusing on the necessity of first Islamizing Palestine and the Arab world. But among Palestinians the appeal of Islamism grew as Israel’s relentless repression of the PLO caused people in the West Bank and Gaza to look for alternatives.

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U.S. diplomats and CIA officials were aware that Israel was fostering Islamism in the occupied territories. “We saw Israel cultivate Islam as a counterweight to Palestinian nationalism,” says Martha Kessler, a senior analyst for the CIA who early on was alert to the importance of the Islamist movement and the threat it could pose to U.S. interests in the region.²⁰ But neither the CIA nor the State Department tried to stop it. Throughout the foreign service and the national security bureaucracy in Washington, there was division as to the significance of Palestinian Islamism. Some saw

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In Syria, the final showdown between Assad’s government and the Brotherhood took place in Hama, a Syrian city of 200,000 which had always been a stronghold of Sunni fundamentalism. It began, recalls former U.S. ambassador Seelye, with a rumor. “The events in Hama started with a false report that Assad had been overthrown,” Seelye says. Excited by the news, the Muslim Brotherhood went on a murder spree in the city, slaughtering hundreds of soldiers and Syrian officials. “The Islamists killed all of the Baathist officials in the city,” says Seelye.⁴¹ For Assad, it was an intolerable provocation. He assembled his army special forces, under the command of his brother, Rifaat Assad, a notoriously heavy-handed enforcer. Thousands of troops—12,000,

according to Amnesty International, with the Brotherhood claiming there were upwards of 50,000⁴²—entered Hama, ruthlessly suppressing the insurrection and leaving many dead. Again, figures vary. An early report in Time said that 1,000 were killed. Most observers estimated that 5,000 people died. Israeli sources, and the Muslim Brotherhood, both charged that the death toll passed 20,000. Over time, the legend of Hama grew. It was used by Syria’s critics to portray Assad as a ruthless, Stalin-like killer, a depiction that Assad did little to discourage because it intimidated Muslim Brotherhood troublemakers. Reported Time, weeks after the crisis, “There were no signs last week that the trouble in Hama was spreading elsewhere.

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But in Israel’s occupied territories, the Brotherhood was still gaining momentum. In the early 1980s Israel supported the Islamists on several fronts. It was, of course, supporting the Gaza and West Bank Islamists that, in 1987, would found Hamas. It was, with Jordan, backing the Muslim Brotherhood war against Syria. In Afghanistan, Israel quietly supported the jihad against the USSR, backing the Muslim Brotherhood-linked fundamentalists who led the mujahideen. And Israel backed Iran, the militant heart of the Islamist movement, during its long war with Iraq. Not everyone in Israel was happy with the policy of collaborating with Islamists. From all accounts, it was primarily Israel’s far right—Begin, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, and Defense Minister Ariel Sharon—who pursued this policy most aggressively. The Labor Party in Israel tended to see the PLO as a viable partner for negotiations on a final settlement. But the Israeli right opposed a settlement on principle and wanted to hold on to the occupied West Bank, citing biblical reasons for wanting control over Judea and Samaria, the ancient names for that disputed real estate.

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The pattern repeated itself in 2000. Netanyahu fell in 1999, and was replaced by Barak, who reengaged the PLO in negotiations and, with President Clinton’s help, came close to reaching a comprehensive deal. Once again, however, the Israeli right provoked the Islamists. In September 2000, Sharon made a heavy-handed, provocative visit to an Islamic holy site, the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, an action calculated to provoke the Muslim Brotherhood fundamentalists, and it did. The result was the second intifada (2000–2004). Suicide attacks in Israel murdered scores of Jews, and stampeded security-minded Israeli voters into Sharon’s camp. Sharon was overwhelmingly elected prime minister, dooming any chance of a PLO-Israel deal.

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According to Bennigsen, the most significant of the Sufi brotherhoods was a secret society called the Naqshbandiya, a Freemason-style fraternity closely tied to the elite of Turkey, which had long-standing connections in Central Asia. The Naqshbandiya were especially strong in Chechnya, Dagestan, and parts of Central Asia, including southern Uzbekistan. “The Naqshbandiya adepts have a long tradition of ‘Holy War’ against the Russians,” wrote Bennigsen. His conclusion was that nationalism in Central Asia was inextricably bound up with radical political Islam: Since [World War II] some orders have become more and more infused with nationalism, with the result that any nationalist movement—even progressive—which is bound to emerge will be strongly influenced by the traditionalist conservative idea of Sufism. That such a movement will emerge is beyond doubt.¹¹ Bennigsen, and others in his circle, urged a stronger U.S. effort to encourage political Islam in the Soviet republics to revolt, even though, as Bennigsen wrote, the most likely outcome would be “probably,

a conservative Islamic radicalism comparable to that of the present-day 'Islamic Revolution' in Iran.”¹² Bennigsen's rather cavalier attitude toward the emergence of radical-Islamist governments in Central Asia precisely paralleled Brzezinski's belief that the United States ought to foster the spread of Islamism in Afghanistan without worrying about the consequences. “In the 1970s, Bennigsen and I taught a seminar on Soviet nationality affairs,” says Jeremy Azrael, author of *Emergent Nationality Problems in the USSR* (1977).

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the late 1970s, it no longer seemed so far off to Bennigsen, Brzezinski, and Henze. They joined forces with Richard Pipes, another advocate of the Islamic card, who had been writing about Central Asian Muslims and the threat to the Soviet Union since the 1950s, including a two-part analysis published in the *Middle East Journal* in 1955 entitled: “Muslims of Soviet Central Asia: Trends and Prospects.” In it, Pipes wrote: “The entire area of Central Asia, including Chinese Turkestan with which Russian Central Asia has always been closely connected, may well tend to move with time in the direction of independent statehood. It is not inconceivable that this vast territory may some day be encompassed in a new Turkic, Muslim state oriented toward the Middle East.”¹⁸ Pipes, who once wrote that Soviet Muslims would “explode into genocidal fury” against Moscow,¹⁹ also wrote extensively on the nationalities problem in Soviet Central Asia, and when President Reagan replaced Carter in 1981, Pipes assumed chairmanship of the Nationalities Working Group. Many other scholars and experts on the Soviet Union disagreed with Bennigsen and his followers, and in any case no such anti-Soviet Muslim revolt emerged. Radical political Islam was not a factor in the dissolution of the USSR after perestroika, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and the establishment of Central Asia's republics. The Central Asian regimes that emerged in the 1990s were not tinged with Islamism. Instead they found themselves battling militant Islamists from Al Qaeda to the Islamic Liberation Party, and a case can be made that, if anything, America's support for political Islam in Asia has aided the growth of a terrorist Islamist underground in Chechnya, Uzbekistan, and other countries in the region.

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Inside Afghanistan, however, the vacillating Daoud began to tilt right, under pressure from the United States, the shah of Iran, and Pakistan. Between 1975 and 1978, Daoud switched sides, breaking decisively with his left-wing supporters and embracing the army and Afghanistan's conservative establishment. In 1976, Daoud met with the shah and Prime Minister Bhutto, and in response he began to install right-wing officers and other pro-Western leaders in key posts. By 1978, Afghan government death squads started assassinating leftist and communist leaders, and the communists and the left were purged from the Kabul regime. Increasingly, Daoud's power base was reduced to a small, ultraconservative clique and the armed forces, and, according to Cordovez and Harrison, behind-the-scenes power was wielded by SAVAK, the allies of Saudi Arabia's Muslim World League, and the Muslim Brotherhood.³² The crisis raged until April 1978, when Nur Mohammed Taraki, a communist, staged a pro-Soviet coup d'état and signed a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union. The Islamic right, supported by the ISI, carried out a countrywide campaign of terrorism, assassinating hundreds of teachers and civil servants in a Pol Pot-style attack against secular and educated Afghans.

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But behind that secret, of course, was yet another: that the United States had been involved with the Islamic right in Afghanistan and the Middle East throughout the 1970s. In addition, the Afghan holy war began in earnest not

in 1980, after Soviet troops crossed the border, and not in 1979, when CIA aid officially began to flow, but in 1978, when the Afghan Islamic right began a coordinated uprising with ISI support, starting in northeast Afghanistan. In March 1979, the western half of the country exploded, especially Herat, a major provincial capital in the west, close to Iran.

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Hekmatyar had a well-earned reputation for being a brutal fanatic: Gulbuddin was the darling of Zia and the Pakistan intelligence service. Like other mujahideen leaders, he had been working with the ISI since the early 1970s, when Pakistan had begun secretly backing fundamentalist students at the University of Kabul who were rebelling against Soviet influence in the Afghan government. Back then Gulbuddin was very much a part of the emerging global wave of Islamic radicalism. By all accounts, he was responsible for the practice of throwing acid in the faces of Afghan women who failed to cover themselves properly.⁴²

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According to Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani journalist and author of *Taliban*, between 1982 and 1992 35,000 radical Islamists from forty-three countries fought alongside the mujahideen in the war and its aftermath, and tens of thousands of additional jihadis trained in the madrassas that General Zia created along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. “Eventually more than 100,000 Muslim radicals were to have direct contact with Pakistan and Afghanistan and be influenced by the jihad.”²³

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The secret Reagan-Casey contacts with Iran in 1980–81 foreshadowed efforts during the Reagan administration to maintain covert ties with the Iranian ayatollahs. Some U.S. officials saw Iran as an ally in the growing war in Afghanistan, since Khomeini was bitterly opposed to the Soviet Union and wanted to extend Iranian influence into Afghanistan and Central Asia. Others saw Iran as a counterweight to Iraq, for two reasons: first, because of the Soviet Union’s close ties to Baghdad, but second, and more important, because a powerful Iraq was seen as a threat to Israel.

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From 1980 to 1987, even as the United States officially backed Iraq, the Israelis supplied Iran with a steady stream of arms, ammunition, and spare parts. Whether or not it was part of a secret deal between Casey, Israel, and Iran, the Reagan administration did nothing to get Israel to stop arming the ayatollahs. In doing so, Israel was drawing on its many contacts with Iran during the shah’s rule. When the shah was toppled, the Israelis continued to work with Iranian army and intelligence officers they knew, even though the officers were now reporting to mullahs and ayatollahs. Israel’s ties to Khomeini’s Iran were multifaceted. They had links to Iran’s armed forces and the successor organization to the shah’s SAVAK secret service. In addition, thousands of Iranian Jews had long been active in the bazaar merchant class, many of whom had immigrated to Israel but maintained ties to Iran, including links to the families of the wealthier, conservative ayatollahs. Israel capitalized on those contacts, too.

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The loudest voice calling for a reconciliation with Algeria's Islamists was none other than Graham Fuller, the former CIA analyst who had worked with Casey to build a justification for the 1984–86 Iran-contra approach to Teheran. Then ensconced at the RAND Corporation, Fuller wrote a book entitled *Algeria: The Next Fundamentalist State?* In it, he virtually endorsed FIS as Algeria's next rulers and urged the United States not to worry. "The FIS is unlikely to present a massive challenge to U.S. and Western interests," wrote Fuller. "Is the United States willing to inaugurate democratic processes in which the Islamists stand a very good chance of gaining a significant voice in power?"¹⁶ Fuller admitted that FIS would suppress women's rights and spread the gospel abroad, "emboldening other Islamist movements in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco [with] asylum, financial aid, even weapons."¹⁷ But he argued that its momentum was unstoppable. "It will be very difficult, if not almost impossible, to stop Islamist forces," said Fuller. "Islamist governments in the Middle East are likely to multiply in the years ahead, taking numerous different forms. They, and the West, are going to have to learn to live with each other."¹⁸ Fuller argued that FIS "is likely to welcome U.S. private sector investment in Algeria and to undertake close commercial relations with the United States.... The FIS has long had good ties with Saudi Arabia and received a great deal of Saudi funding until recent years."¹⁹ Fuller's monograph was written for and sponsored by the U.S. Army. To Fuller, the FIS movement in Algeria

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Not only Iraq is vulnerable to disintegration, but the neoconservatives have made explicit their intention to collapse Saudi Arabia, too. In their book, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror*, Richard Perle and David Frum, both fellows at the American Enterprise Institute, suggest mobilizing Shiite fundamentalists against the Saudi state. Because the Shiites are a powerful force along the shore of the Persian Gulf, where Saudi oil fields are, Perle and Frum note that the Saudis have long feared "that the Shiites might someday seek independence for the Eastern Province—and its oil." They add: Independence for the Eastern Province would obviously be a catastrophic outcome for the Saudi state. But it might be a very good outcome for the United States. Certainly it's an outcome to ponder. Even more certainly, we would want the Saudis to know we are pondering it.⁶⁶ Max Singer, the co-founder of the Hudson Institute, has repeatedly suggested that the United States seek to dismantle the Saudi kingdom by encouraging breakaway states in both the Eastern Province and the western Hijaz.
