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On: 03 March 2015, At: 10:21

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Terrorism and Political Violence

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ftpv20>

### Islamic extremism and the peace process

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Published online: 21 Dec 2007.

To cite this article: Efraim Inbar (1996) Islamic extremism and the peace process, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 8:2, 199-215, DOI: [10.1080/09546559608427354](https://doi.org/10.1080/09546559608427354)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09546559608427354>

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# Islamic Extremism and the Peace Process

EFRAIM INBAR

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This article first discusses the negative attitude of Islamic radical groups toward Israel and the peace process. It then presents an assessment of the long run potential of the Islamic radicals, as well as their present politico-military capabilities to harm the peace process. The article focuses on the capacity of Islamic radicals to subvert or intimidate the pro-peace Arab regimes, wage war and develop nuclear capabilities. It ends with some observations on how the activities of Islamic extremists influence the ongoing political debate in Israel on the future of the peace process.

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This article offers a strategic analysis of the effects of Islamic extremism in the Middle East on the peace process between Israel and the Arab world.<sup>1</sup> Islam is one of the world's great religions, having greatly contributed to all aspects of human society. The subject of this essay, however, is the political consequences of a specific version of Islam, the radical, which is not the most prevalent, though certainly a source of danger. As a student of international relations, rather than sociology of religion or Arab culture, I will take the liberty to make a few generalizations. I follow the English author, Ben Jonson, who observed, 'The fact of twilight does not mean you cannot tell day from night'. Therefore, I will discuss the political implications of a variety of radical Islamic political entities, focusing on their policy advocacy and capabilities, rather than on their social and theological differences.

In the Middle East, the following Islamic entities are involved in campaigns of varying degrees against Israel and the peace process: Iran and Sudan; opposition groups in countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Turkey; and organizations engaged in direct armed conflict with Israel, such as the Hizballah in Lebanon, and the Islamic Resistance Movement, better known as Hamas, and the Islamic Jihad, in the Land of Israel (Palestine). While different in many aspects, these actors share a commitment to imposing Islamic law (*shari'a*) in their countries, and to demonstrating a principled or religious-motivated opposition to the existence of Israel and the continuation of the peace process. Furthermore, all are known to support or condone extreme and violent methods to achieve their goal. Their emergence is little connected to Arab-Israeli relations, though enmity to Israel certainly enhances their general appeal. Islamic extremism and those who espouse its ideas are responses to the failure of Arab regimes and

societies to cope with the challenges of population growth, urbanization and the management of resources. Indeed, domestic issues are prominent on the political agenda of the proponents of radical versions of Islam, although they maintain a revisionist international outlook.<sup>2</sup>

First, this article discusses the negative attitudes of Islamic radical groups toward Israel and the peace process. Next, it presents an assessment of the long run potential of the Islamic radicals, as well as their present politico-military capabilities to harm the peace process. The article focuses on the capacity of the Islamic radicals to subvert or to intimidate the pro-peace Arab regimes, to wage war and to develop nuclear threats. It ends with some observations on how the activities of Islamic extremists influence the ongoing political debate in Israel on the future of the peace process.

### **Predispositions and Goals**

Islamic writings, as with holy texts of a religion, can be used for a variety of political purposes. In the case of Muslim extremists, Islamic texts are used to justify the theological rejection of the notion of a sovereign Jewish state in the geographical confines of the Islamic world (*Dar al-Islam*).<sup>3</sup> It is true that, in general, Muslims treated Jews whom they ruled benevolently, but this historic precedent does not relate to the emergence of a sovereign Jewish state. For the extremists, such a state is religiously unacceptable and constitutes an affront to God's worldly order. For example, in its covenant Hamas presents the Arab-Israeli struggle not in national or territorial terms, but as a historically, religiously, culturally and existentially irreconcilable conflict between Islam and Judaism, between truth and falsehood.<sup>4</sup>

These negative attitudes toward the Jewish state, in particular, and Jews, in general, are supported by anti-Jewish statements found in the Koran and in classic Islamic texts. A Koranic example of such a sentiment can be found in *sura* II v. 58: 'And abasement and poverty were pitched upon them (the Jews), and they were laden with the burden of God's anger; that, because they had disbelieved the signs of God and slain the Prophets unrightfully; that because they disobeyed, and were transgressors'.<sup>5</sup> This verse has served occasionally for the depiction of Jews in negative terms. Jews were described as traitors, breakers of agreements and distorters of sacred texts. For example, in the fourteenth century, a religious decree (*fatwa*) reiterated the notion that the Jews were the enemy of God since they were 'branded with the marks of wrath and malediction of the Lord...'. In addition, the famous historian Ibn Khaldoun, living in the same century, claimed that the Jews were infected with corruption and deceitful plotting.<sup>6</sup> Nowadays, Hamas leaflets refer to the Jews as the brothers of apes, the

killers of Prophets, bloodsuckers, the descendants of treachery and deceit, who spread corruption in the land of Islam.<sup>7</sup> Shaykh Mohammed Fadlallah, the spiritual leader of Hizballah, said that 'the struggle against the Jewish state, in which all Muslims are engaged, is a continuation of the old struggle of the Muslims against the Jews' conspiracy against Islam'.<sup>8</sup>

Another important element of the *weltanschauung* of Islamic extremists is their antagonism toward the West.<sup>9</sup> Peoples colonized by the West generally tend to feel a mixture of resentment and envy toward their previous rulers.<sup>10</sup> Radical Islamic ideology, in particular, displays great hostility toward the West, its culture and values.<sup>11</sup> According to Bernard Lewis, 'Islam was never prepared, either in theory or in practice, to accord full equality to those who held other beliefs, and practiced other forms of worship'.<sup>12</sup> Islamic fundamentalists are confident that their struggle is for the glory of God, while all their opponents, Muslims or infidels, are fighting against God. Their anti-western outlook is also the result of the belief that the West and its colonialist heritage, as well as its neo-colonialist presence, are corrupting the Islamic way of life.

Israel, rightly or wrongly, is seen as an alien extension of the West into the Middle East. Accordingly, the Jewish state is perceived to be a tool in the western scheme to dominate the region. Islamic and Marxist explanations (the latter is still fashionable in certain Arab intellectual circles) converge in portraying Israel as a 'lackey of western imperialism'.

In addition to providing for great animosity towards Israel, radical Islamic thinking and fervor support the intellectual framework for protracted conflict, such as the Arab-Israeli dispute. By arming themselves with a long-range historical perspective, radical Muslims can easily explain present failures as temporary setbacks.

As noted, Islamic extremist groups have demonstrated a great commitment to achieving prescribed goals with little concern for the methods used. Such attitudes are generally congruent with the rules of the Mideast political game.<sup>13</sup> Use of force between states, as well as subversion against neighboring regimes, is an acceptable practice. Islamic extremists have displayed a willingness to pay a high price for their actions, including the loss of many lives. Indeed, *jihad*, holy war, is often invoked in the service of goal achievement, and those sacrificing their lives in the process are accorded martyr status (*shaheed*) with special privileges in the afterlife.

The objectives of Islamic extremists concerning Israel is very clear. Their goal is Politicide. Coined by the late Yehoshafat Harkabi in the 1960s as a description of the PLO's goal to eliminate Israel, politicide denotes the campaign to destroy a political entity.<sup>14</sup> For example, the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Rafsanjani, during his visit to France in September 1994, said that Israel is an illegitimate phenomenon just like the Nazi

conquest of France. He added that the Jews should go back to their countries of origin.<sup>15</sup> In reaction to the Washington Declaration, Shaykh Youssouf Alshami of the Islamic Jihad said that the declaration's significance was only that a few Palestinians were allowed to return to their homeland. He said, 'the borders of Palestine are from Ras Nakura (at the Lebanese border) to Rafah, from the sea to the Jordan river... did anybody hear before 50 years about a nation called the Jewish people?!... the present balance of power cannot last forever, and in politics nothing is impossible'.<sup>16</sup> A Hizballah tract issued by the group's office in Beirut reads, 'Our confrontation with the Zionist entity must end with its obliteration from existence. This is why we do not recognize any cease-fire agreement, any truce, or any separate or non-separate peace treaty with it'.<sup>17</sup>

Politicide is a radical goal, somewhat unusual in world politics, but less so in the Middle East. In addition to Israel, Lebanon, Kuwait and Jordan have been, or still are, objects of politicide. In this region, international borders and existing political entities, which were the creations of British and French colonialism, do not command the respect of all Mideasterners. In accordance with pan-Arabism, which is no less of a transnational ideology than extreme Islam, the Arab countries must unite into a single political structure. Radical Islam does not only challenge the structure of a specific state, but the entire Mideast international order.

The Islamic extremists are adamantly opposed to the peace process. This process involves the recognition of the state of Israel and a formal end to the state of war between Arabs and Israelis, in order to bring about a qualitatively different type of relations between the protagonists. The normative aspect of the peace process, which lends legitimacy to the Jewish state, is probably the most disturbing from the radical perspective. Indeed, in a move designed to oppose the October 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, Iran convened a parallel meeting of Islamic extremist groups. The purpose of the Islamic conference was to reach a joint strategy to fight the peace process.

Furthermore, the peace process is anathema because it is American-sponsored and enhances the American presence in the Middle East. For example, the Islamic opposition in Jordan boycotted President Clinton's address to the Jordanian Parliament, following the ceremony of the signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan. According to Hazam Mansour, the Islamists' spokesman, 'Clinton is the enemy of the Arab and the Islamic nation'.<sup>18</sup>

What Islamic extremists fear is American-Israeli cultural and economic domination of the region, and a subsequent corruption of Islamic values. Because of the great importance they ascribe to linkages between politics and culture, their opposition to the peace process and its perceived politico-cultural implications is high on their agendas.

Indeed, the peace process is in their – mostly correct – analysis an expression of the zenith of American power in international affairs and an ebb in the political standing of the failing and corrupt secular elites in the Arab world. In their perception, Israel is being accepted as a *fait accompli* due to weakness and because of their inability to eradicate the Jewish state. The religious radicals are fully aware of the deficiencies of the present Arab political systems and the consequences for effective action in the international arena.

Yet, precisely because of sensitivity to the political arena, a temporary cease-fire with the Zionist entity, under certain circumstances, is not entirely ruled out by all Islamic extremists. Rafsanjani, in contrast to Hamanai, the ideologue of the revolution, declared that, despite the fact that Iran opposes any agreement with Israel, the Palestinians have a right to decide on this issue, and Iran would not stand in their way.<sup>19</sup> There are even voices within Hamas that call for some accommodation. Musa Abu Marzuk, the chairman of its political executive, said that his organization is willing to live in peace with Israel if it returned to the 1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem, paid reparations to the Palestinians and held free elections in the territories.<sup>20</sup> In February 1996, Hamas even seemed willing to enter into cease-fire negotiations with Israel. Indeed, a truce with Israel does not require too excessive theological creativity. The truce between Mohammed and the Quraish tribe of infidels – later violated – can serve as a precedent.

To sum up, Islamic radicals have expressed a strong desire to destroy Israel, and to obstruct the American-sponsored peace process. While they are ready to make considerable sacrifices to achieve their goals, there is also a potential for temporarily adjusting to the prevailing power structure. We will turn now to an assessment of their capabilities.

### Capabilities

This section analyzes the ability of the radical Islamic entities to disrupt the peace process by waging war, engaging in low intensity conflict (LIC), using subversion to replace those leaders who are willing to participate in the peace process or intimidating the ruling elite to adopt anti-peace policies.

#### *Conventional War*

The Islamic states do not yet pose a serious conventional military challenge to Israel, to its neighbors or to the peace process. Sudan is not much of a military power; Iran is rebuilding its military might, but its ability to project power to the Arab-Israeli arena is extremely limited for the time being.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, neither Iran nor Sudan is territorially contiguous with Israel. This geographic fact prevents them from waging a conventional, large-scale military attack, or even a war of attrition against Israel. Furthermore, the fighter airplanes in the arsenals of the two states do not have the operational range to attack targets into Israel, and no air refueling is available to extend their range.

Yet, Iran can serve, to some extent, as a strategic hinterland for Syria, despite the absence of a common border. We may even envision an Iranian expeditionary force in case of a Syrian-Israeli war. In fall 1995, Iran received from North Korea the Nodong missile, with a range of 1000 km. It will allow Iran to attack targets in Israel with conventional warheads and enhance Iran's capability to project power in the whole region, as well as to interfere in the Arab-Israeli arena. However, despite the rhetoric of the Islamic regime, Iranian foreign policy has been cautious.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, intervention of the kinds mentioned is not very likely and, even if played out, of limited military consequence.

A conventional war by an Islamic state against one of the Arab states which supports the peace process is also unlikely. The ability of Iran to launch a ground attack against these neighbors of Israel who signed peace treaties is negligible at best. Iran could project military power in the Gulf area, but an outright war against one of the Gulf monarchies because it opened diplomatic relations with Israel is highly unlikely.

#### *The Nuclear Threat*

Radical Islam poses a threat also in the area of missile and nuclear proliferation. Iran is currently attempting to acquire both capabilities to buttress the country's hegemony in the Gulf area and to enhance its stature in Central Asia and the Middle East. It renewed the nuclear program started in the days of the Shah but frozen by Khomeini. US Secretary of Defense William Perry expressed his concern that Iran might purchase or steal a nuclear bomb from the ex-Soviet republics 'in a week, a month, or five years – everything is possible'.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the US was unable to stop the sale of Russian nuclear reactors and sensitive technology to the Islamic republic. Similarly, the May 1995 renewal of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime, which is far from being a foolproof security arrangement, would hardly constrain the Iranian efforts in this area.<sup>24</sup>

In light of the great hostility that Iran has shown to Israel, the possession of such capabilities may elicit Israeli preemptive attacks against the Iranian nuclear infrastructure similar to the 1981 air raid against the Iraqi nuclear reactor. Israel has purchased from the United States a number of F-15I jetfighters to allow, *inter alia*, exactly for such a military option. Such an

attack might heighten Arab threat perceptions and have repercussions on the peace.

Furthermore, a nuclear Iran would also increase the pressures for enhanced Arab nuclear activities. Revolutionary Iran may decide to be cautious and not initiate a nuclear duel with Israel, which does not challenge Iran's hegemony in its immediate environment. Yet, the incentive for an Arab nuclear bomb is more of a problem for Israel than a direct Iranian nuclear threat. The absence of such a bomb was one of the reasons for the Arabs to come to terms with Israel, while the introduction of nuclear weapons to an Arab arsenal would have a most destabilizing effect on the Arab-Israeli arena. There are difficult problems – technical and political – in applying the model of the nuclear relations between the Soviet Union and the US to the Middle East.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, Iranian acquisition of a nuclear bomb would put an end to one of the common goals between Israel and all Arab states – the prevention of such a scenario. The fear of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East has been one of the reasons for several Arab countries to lend support to the peace process, which includes a multilateral forum on Arms Control and Regional Security. There were hopes in the US, Israel and in several Arab capitals to use this forum to treat the issue of nuclear proliferation in the region.<sup>26</sup>

The successful completion of the Iranian nuclear program would also be an affront to the US and its perceived hegemonic role in the region and the world. The American-sponsored peace process may well be affected by a changed evaluation as to American will and capacity to influence the implementation of its preferred policies: counter-proliferation and an Arab-Israeli detente.

#### *Low Intensity Conflict (LIC)*

The Islamic states do engage, however, in a war by proxy against Israel. They support LIC operations conducted by organizations based along Israel's borders (Lebanon and Gaza) and within Israeli-ruled territories and the Palestinian Authority (PA).<sup>27</sup> Such activities are relatively cheap and therefore not too taxing for the Iranian, and even the weak Sudanese, economies.

At the end of 1992, Hamas signed an agreement of cooperation with Iran. The latter committed itself to train Hamas members and to grant the organization generous financial support.<sup>28</sup> Sudan also provides training to Hamas and the Islamic Jihad. Hizballah, in Lebanon, is also under Iranian tutelage and is allowed freedom of action by Iran's secular ally, Syria. It fights the Israel Defense Force (IDF) and the South Lebanese Army, and

occasionally launches Katyusha attacks on Israeli border communities. Moreover, in early 1993, Iran supplied Hizballah with Soviet-made anti-tank Sagger missiles. These significantly increased Hizballah's firepower and ability to harm Israeli forces and allies. According to then Israeli Deputy Defense Minister, Mordechai Gur, the Hizballah began to fire shoulder surface-to-air missiles against Israeli helicopters in fall 1994.<sup>29</sup>

The war of attrition in South Lebanon resulted in 23 Israeli casualties in 1995 (21 in 1994, 26 in 1993, but only 13 in 1992) and has become a political burden for the Israeli leadership. Despite the growing sensitivity to casualties in this sector, Israel's response has generally been low key and limited to strikes at Hizballah targets. The Syrians in Lebanon, who can restrict the activities of the Hizballah, seem immune to Israeli retaliation because of Israel's desire to project a moderate image toward the Arab world in order to advance the peace process. Indeed, high ranking officers in Israel's Northern Command have often complained that the politicians are tying their hands in the struggle against Hizballah.<sup>30</sup>

Hamas and the Islamic Jihad specialize in terrorist acts against Israeli military and civilian targets: shootings, knifings and suicide bombing. They have also kidnapped IDF soldiers. Terrorist attacks (mostly by Islamic activists) led to 67 Israeli fatalities in 1994, a 15.5 per cent increase from 1993. In a period of two and a half years, since the September 1993 agreement, over 200 Israelis have been killed in terrorist activities. Suicide bombers are by definition undeterred, a fact which makes defense against such acts all the more difficult.

A significant portion of the political leadership of these two organizations presently resides in Syria and enjoys considerable freedom of action there. This facilitates contacts with Iran, which has had excellent relations with Syria for many years. The establishment of the PA also enhances their capacity for action, as long as this new entity is unwilling or unable to monopolize the use of force in its territory. Indeed, some of the terrorist acts perpetrated by the two organizations were planned in the area under the PA jurisdiction, and the perpetrators found refuge there. The availability of explosives has also increased since the arrival of the PLO to Gaza and Jericho.

The main rationale for the terrorist acts of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad is to keep alive the flames of the Palestinian/Islamic struggle against Israel's existence; to defy and embarrass the PA; and to provoke Israel to take harsh measures against Palestinians under its or the PA's jurisdiction. Hamas and Islamic Jihad also believe that their actions will lead to further Israeli withdrawals, as well as to the derailing of the peace process.

From a purely military point of view, terror is not a major problem for Israel, as it does not threaten its basic existence. In the short run, terrorist

attacks have a limited impact on the Israeli economy and society, though it can drastically change the mood of the country for short periods of time. The political ramifications of such terrorism for Israel are more complex and are discussed in the next section. The measures needed to combat Islamic terrorism – intelligence and counter-insurgency – are relatively cheap, particularly if compared to large-scale military operations that include the use of the air force and armored units. This strengthens the disposition not to view Palestinian terrorism as a major strategic problem.

### *Subversion*

Other Islamic groups are actively engaged in subversion against Arab regimes participating in the peace process. Iran and Sudan lend various forms of support to Islamic groups everywhere and make the struggle against them more difficult. The continuous success of the present regimes in prevailing over the Islamic fundamentalists should not to be taken for granted.

In recent years, Egypt has been under growing pressure from its radical Islamic opposition. Egyptian Christians (Copts) and foreign tourists have become the targets of terrorist attacks. Such attacks have spread gradually from the south to the north, even reaching the capital, Cairo. They have included attempts on the lives of senior governmental officials, and the Egyptian security forces have also been increasingly harassed by the Islamic activists. The consequences of this campaign were felt in economic and political terms. Decline in Egypt's tourism reached an annual loss of \$500,000,000. The regime's overall stability has been called into question, as well.<sup>31</sup>

The Mubarak regime has undertaken great efforts to contain the Islamic threat at home, including arresting Islamic extremists en masse, actively hunting and eliminating such radicals, and executing those Islamic activists found guilty of terrorism by the military courts, which have had such matters under their jurisdiction since 1992. Yet, Egypt is plagued with enormous social and economic problems which foster social unrest and enhance support for the Islamic alternative. The ultimate prerequisite for an Islamic takeover is the ability to infiltrate Egypt's army and the security forces, the mainstay of the present regime, and to organize a successful coup. Egypt, to a lesser extent than other Mideastern states, is a 'one-bullet regime'. Yet, a successful political assassination could bring about a succession struggle and political instability. A successful Islamic revolution in Egypt, the most populous Arab country, would reverberate throughout the region. It would change the Middle East and would probably put an end to the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt – a cornerstone of the current peace process.

Such an event in Turkey – although much less likely – would also result in a political earthquake throughout the region. Notably, the Islamic Welfare Party (Refah) was very successful during the March 1994 municipal elections. Refah, which is well financed and mainly supported by disaffected migrants to large cities, obtained 19 per cent of the overall vote and won control of 27 provincial capitals, including the two largest cities, Istanbul and Ankara. Moreover, in the national elections of December 1995, the Islamic party received a plurality in parliament and eventually became part of the governing coalition.<sup>32</sup> In contrast to Egypt, but closer to the situation in Jordan, the Islamic opposition in Turkey is part of the political system, a position which probably has a moderating effect.

Hashemite Jordan also faces a strong fundamentalist opposition; the Islamic Action Front (IAF) is the largest Jordanian opposition group. Thus far, King Hussein has successfully tamed the Islamic opposition.<sup>33</sup> By changing the electoral rules before the November 1993 elections, Hussein reduced the Islamic opposition's parliamentary power from 34 seats (received in the April 1989 elections) to 21 in the 80-seat lower house, although they maintained their hold on 15 per cent of the popular vote. Subversive groups in Jordan, which seek to overthrow the monarchy, include the Army of Mohammed and the Young Voice of Islam. Their links to the Iranian regime were established at the trials of their activists. The death of King Hussein may bring about a period of domestic instability. If the Muslims take the palace, Jordan would probably revoke its October 1994 peace treaty with Israel and might become a staging area in a revived Eastern Front. The Islamic opposition is openly and vehemently against the peace treaty. Hamza Mansour, its spokesman, even compared the relations with Israel to AIDS.<sup>34</sup>

The PLO is also challenged by an Islamic opposition, which rejects the Oslo agreements: Hamas and the Islamic Jihad.<sup>35</sup> Significantly, the tensions between the two have not yet resulted in a civil war, though several clashes between the PA police and the Islamic radicals have already occurred. Hamas is believed to have a considerable following in Gaza and in the Hebron area; its network of institutions is involved in providing educational, social and religious services.<sup>36</sup> Arafat was not ready to enter a confrontation and has allowed Hamas to keep its arms, while the latter agreed not to display them in public. While several Islamists ran for the Palestinian Council in the January 1996 elections, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad formally boycotted the elections, after which Arafat's political position seemed to have improved. He was better able to secure a monopoly over the use of force in his nascent entity, but continued to prefer cooptation rather than confrontation.<sup>37</sup>

A series of terrorist attacks in the winter of 1996 reinforced Israeli

demands from the PA to do more in curbing Islamic extremists' freedom of action. As the Israeli pressures on Arafat to rein in Hamas and Islamic Jihad continue to mount, particularly as a condition for the transfer of additional areas to his control, a showdown between the PA and the Islamic opposition might be in the offing. If the PA fails to demonstrate effective control over the territory under its jurisdiction, Palestinians as well as Israelis will question the wisdom of dealing with Arafat. A politically-fragmented Palestinian entity, which is not a far-fetched scenario, will place strains on the Palestinian track of the peace process.

### *Intimidation*

Islamic radicals do not have to be in power in order to harm the peace process. They can intimidate rulers to refrain from becoming too close to Israel through the use of several means, including attempts at their lives. We are reminded of the assassination of Anwar Sadat and the recent attempt to assassinate Mubarak. Indeed, Mohammed Barjawi, a Hizballah MP in Lebanon, criticized King Hussein for his peace treaty with Israel and added that 'there will always be somebody to assassinate traitors'.<sup>38</sup>

Even less radical measures can have a harmful effect on the peace process. The expectations of economic prosperity brought on by the peace process, exaggerated in any case,<sup>39</sup> can be significantly curtailed by Islamic terrorist attacks on Israeli and/or western tourists and businessmen in Egypt, Jordan or the Palestinian-held territories. Instability is not attractive to foreign investment, as demonstrated by the difficulties which the PA has faced in realizing the foreign aid commitments of the donor countries and enticing foreign investments for Palestinian industries.<sup>40</sup> Additional economic setbacks could further complicate matters, as improvements in the terrible economic conditions in Gaza are an important test of the PLO's decision to make a deal with Israel. Without significant advances in the standard of living there, the impoverished population may withdraw its support for Arafat and opt for the Islamic opposition.

It is noteworthy that the political leadership in Egypt and Jordan were not deflected from their diplomatic course *vis-à-vis* Israel, despite strong Islamic opposition. Similarly, Turkey has considerably improved its relations with Israel, showing little regard for the anti-Israeli disposition of the growing Turkish Islamic movement.

### **Impact on Israel**

A somewhat simplistic analysis of Israeli politics juxtaposes two competing visions concerning the future of the Middle East and Israel's road to peace;

it is actually a multi-dimensional continuum.<sup>41</sup> The most famous proponent for the vision propagated by the Left is Israel's former prime minister, Shimon Peres, who wrote a book about the emergence of a peaceful and economically prosperous new Middle East. He wrote, 'instead of visions of blood and tears there will rise visions of happiness and beauty, life and peace'.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, the peace process is an important part of this historic process, by including the acceptance of Israel as a member of the emerging new Middle East. It is argued that the new strategic reality is more benign than in the past, therefore allowing Israel to enjoy lower threat perception than in the past.<sup>43</sup>

The contrasting picture, as seen by the Right, is of a Middle East remaining as a zone of turmoil;<sup>44</sup> unstable and war-prone. The Right points out the unbending hostility of the Islamic radicals and their rhetoric against the existence of the Jewish state, which evokes among Israelis traditional existential fears. The Left makes efforts to dismiss such fears as a failure in seeing the new emerging reality. The Right also stresses the fragility of the peace treaties and the need to cautiously evaluate the emerging regional trends, and even slow down the peace process with the Palestinians and the Syrians. The Islamists' determination to reverse the peace process blends well into these calls for greater caution regarding the calculated risks Israel is taking in attempting to reach formal peace agreements. The Right holds that it is possible that these will be violated by Arab countries under new Islamist leadership.

The Right also warns that the peace process will not bring the sort of economic rewards that the Left promises, and thus, it is a mistake to expect political stability in the Arab world.<sup>45</sup> Past attacks on Israeli tourists in Egypt and the boycott on Israeli products and on contacts with Israelis have reduced the attraction of the peace process in Israel. Similar behavior in Jordan could indicate to Israel the limitations on its attempts to integrate into the region.

The rebuttal from the Left is that the growing appeal of Islamist groups can be countered with educational and economic improvement, which will reduce the support of the poor and the deprived for the Islamist platform. The Left also argues that a reallocation of resources in the Arab world at the expense of defense expenditures is possible only in the context of a peace process, while massive foreign aid can be mobilized only if the political climate changes in the Middle East. Furthermore, the Left in Israel stresses the urgency of successfully concluding the peace process to preempt a possible deterioration in the political standing of the present Arab leaders who are contemplating peace with Israel. Their survival is also dependent upon their ability to provide a better life for their people. Therefore, Israel and the West have an interest in providing economic aid. The emphasis on

the importance of economic factors in the peace process and the developing Middle East is the result of two intellectual influences: socialism and liberalism.<sup>46</sup> The Laborite leadership, Peres in particular, has socialist ideological roots, which have been gradually replaced or complemented by liberal ideas coming from the US.

The terrorist acts perpetrated by the Islamic extremists have had mixed effects on Israel. Over the years, the Jewish state has developed social mechanisms which routinize the impact of armed conflict.<sup>47</sup> This is a cushion which minimizes the socio-economic and political repercussions of terror. In the short run, Israeli positions are hardened by terrorist attacks, while in the long run, these attacks have influenced Israeli public opinion in the dovish direction, that is, a greater willingness to withdraw from Israeli-ruled territories.<sup>48</sup> Israeli society has become war-weary; it is less willing to pay the price involved in the continuation of the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict. Moreover, increasing terrorism seems to have elevated the costs of holding onto the territories, and an increasing number of Israelis consider withdrawal from part or all of the territories a positive step (in the framework of a negotiated settlement). Israelis understand that one reason for the successful terrorist acts is the accessibility of Israeli cities as a result of its control of the territories. It is the Left that claims that separation between Arabs and Jews by withdrawing from heavily Arab-populated areas could minimize the chances for successful terrorist acts. In this respect, Islamic terrorism pushes the Israelis toward greater willingness to part with the territories and to make a deal with the Palestinians. Yet, the emergence of terrorist havens in PA-controlled zones may lead Israelis to reconsider the direction of the peace with the Palestinians.

A similar dynamic seems to occur on the Syrian track of the peace process. Hizballah's costly war of attrition in South Lebanon is bringing about a softer Israeli negotiating position, which makes a deal with Syria closer. Israeli sensitivity to casualties pushes the Left to question the need for a security zone in South Lebanon and to accept a Syrian role in Lebanon. Indeed, Rabin pointed out that an agreement with Syria is needed to put an end to the costly armed conflict in South Lebanon.<sup>49</sup> In addition, hints by the Labor-led government of willingness to cede the Golan Heights have eroded the large majority of Israelis opposing any withdrawal from the strategic plateau.

The cumulative effect of terrorism was one factor which undermined the popularity of the Yitzhak Rabin-led government, as well as Rabin's own reputation as 'Mr. Security'. The government's initial line about terror casualties being 'the victims of peace' was not well received and was therefore dropped. Support for the Rabin government fell to a record low by the winter of 1995.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the series of terrorist attacks in February and

March 1996 brought an erosion in the popularity of Rabin's successor, Peres; and it was easier for the Likud to point out the shortcomings of the Labor approach toward the Palestinians. Yet, these attacks had only limited influence on the outcome of the elections two and a half months later (May 1996) – an eternity in Israeli politics.<sup>51</sup>

The nuclear threat emanating from Iran, which the Labor government has strongly emphasized, has similarly generated mixed responses. The Left sees in the peace a panacea to all regional problems, including nuclear proliferation. The fear of nuclear proliferation also fits well with the dovish predisposition to hurry 'before the window of opportunity closes'. Furthermore, since Israel is relying less than before on unilateral measures and might not be in the position to eliminate the Iranian nuclear threat on its own, the Labor-led government hoped to build an international coalition to prevent the fruition of the Iranian nuclear program. Labor-led Israel wanted the Arabs to join the effort.<sup>52</sup>

While in favor of international action to prevent Iran acquiring a nuclear bomb, the Right claims that the Arabs have a good reason to do so without any Israeli concessions. Furthermore, right-wing politicians are much more skeptical concerning the effectiveness of an international effort and the American willingness to play a leading role. Therefore, the nuclear specter is another indication that existential threats are still around. The possibility of a nuclear bomb in the hands of Islamic extremists is a nightmare for all Israelis. The extremists do not hide their politicized goal, and there are serious difficulties deterring a determined opponent with a low sensitivity to cost.<sup>53</sup> The chances for stable deterrence in a nuclearized Middle East seem to be slim.

### Conclusion

Religion is of great political consequence and cannot be easily discarded as a relic of the past, or the haven of the ignorant and poor. Max Weber was wrong in writing about the 'Entzauberung der Welt', by which he meant that the modern world is disenchanted and is no longer seeking sacredness. He minimized the impact of religion. Yet, traditional patterns do not fade away easily. Consequently, what we see today is indeed a new version of the impact of religion on politics, but much of its underlying logic is going to remain with us and not disappear. Religion may well be the opium of the people, but Marxist and liberal thinking, which both underscore the importance of economic factors in domestic and international conflict, have proven wrong in heralding the politics of reason.

The radical Islamic threat is here to stay and will not disappear as a result of economic and social engineering by the existing corrupt and

inefficient secular elites, even if much western aid is poured into the Middle East. The Islamic fanatics are intent on dismantling the Jewish state, though they cannot presently do much more than harass Israelis and the supporters of the peace process in Arab countries. The greatest damage can be done to the Palestinian Authority, which is the weakest link in the peace process. The potential for great havoc in the near future exists. It lies primarily in a possible Muslim takeover in Egypt and in a nuclear device in Iran.

The fortunes of the Muslim radicals are dependent primarily upon the interplay of indigenous developments. Neither Israel nor the West can do much about the regional environment. Determination to defend the well-being of innocent citizens and vital interests can command the respect of Islamic foes, who are capable of adapting in the face of superior power. Moderation on their part regarding Israel, the peace process and the West is a possibility that cannot be totally dismissed, but this can happen only in a domestic environment which makes the Islamic radical platform no longer appealing. Only then, a rather unlikely prospect in the near future considering the tremendous domestic problems confronting Middle Eastern societies, will Islamic extremism cease being the threat it constitutes today.

## NOTES

I thank Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, Shmuel Sandler, the participants of the Program on International Political Economy and Security (PIPES) Seminar at the University of Chicago, and Jordan Steng in particular, for their useful comments.

1. For studies of radical Islam, see *inter alia*, Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP 1985); David Menashri (ed.), *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World* (Boulder, CO: Westview 1990); James Piscatori (ed.), *Islamic Fundamentalism and the Gulf Crisis* (Chicago: American Academy of Arts and Sciences 1991); Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza* (Bloomington: Indiana UP 1994); Gabriel Ben-Dor, 'The Uniqueness of Islamic Fundamentalism,' in this volume, pp.239-52. The notions 'Islamic radicalism' and 'extremism' refer to the nature of the goals and the means of the political entities discussed in this article and are used interchangeably. Fundamentalism refers primarily to theological issues and is beyond the scope of this article.
2. P.W. Rodman, 'Co-opt or Confront Fundamentalist Islam', *Middle East Quarterly* 1/4 (Dec. 1994) p.64.
3. See Raphael Israeli, *Fundamentalist Islam and Israel* (Lanham: University Press of America 1993).
4. See Raphael Israeli, 'The Charter of Allah: The Platform of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)', *Israel Affairs* 2/1 (Autumn 1995) pp.273-93.
5. *The Koran Interpreted*, trans. by Arthur J. Arberry (NY: Macmillan 1979) p.36. See also Moshe Maoz, *The Image of the Jew in Official Arab Literature and Communications Media* (Jerusalem: Shazar Library 1976) p.9.
6. Maoz (note 5) pp.9-10.
7. Esther Webman, *Anti-Semitic Motifs in the Ideology of Hizballah and Hamas* (Tel Aviv: The Project for the Study of Anti-Semitism, Tel Aviv University 1994) pp.18-19.
8. M. Kramer, 'The Jihad Against the Jews', *Commentary* (Oct. 1994). For a recent study of

- Hizballah, see Eyal Zisser, 'Hizballah in Lebanon – At the Crossroads', in this volume, pp.90–110.
9. For the Muslim historical and psychological perception of the West, see Graham E. Fuller and Ian O. Lesser, *A Sense of Siege. The Geopolitics of Islam and the West* (Boulder, CO: Westview / A Rand Study 1995) pp.27–80.
  10. Otare D. Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban. The Psychology of Colonization* (NY: Praeger 1964).
  11. B. Lewis, 'The Roots of Muslim Rage', *The Atlantic* (Sept. 1990) pp.47–60.
  12. *Ibid.*, p.56.
  12. *Ibid.*, p.56.
  13. For a recent treatment of the rules of the game in the Middle East, see Y. Evron, 'Gulf Crisis and War: Regional Rules of the Game and Policy and Theoretical Implications', *Security Studies* 4/1 (Autumn 1994) pp. 115–52.
  14. Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Fedayeen Action and Arab Strategy*, Adelphi Paper No.53 (London: IISS 1969).
  15. *Ha'aretz*, 13 Sept. 1994, p.A7.
  16. *al-Quds*, 26 July 1994.
  17. *The Middle East* (Feb. 1992) p.13.
  18. G. Bechor, 'The Voices of Allah,' *Ha'aretz*, 26 Oct. 1994, p.B2.
  19. *al-Quds*, 8 June 1994.
  20. *al-Quds*, 24 April 1994.
  21. For their order-of-battle see the recent volumes of *Military Balance* (London: IISS).
  22. For an elaboration of this point, see Haggay Ram, 'Exporting Iran's Islamic Revolution: Steering a Path between Pan-Islam and Nationalism', in this volume, pp.7–24.
  23. *Ha'aretz*, 6 Jan. 1995, p.A1. For the Iranian motivations, see S. Chubin, 'Does Iran Want Nuclear Weapons?', *Survival* 37/1 (Spring 1995) pp.86–104.
  24. For the weaknesses of the NPT, see Gerald Steinberg, 'Arms Control in the Middle East: Global Regimes vs. Regional Dynamics', in Efraim Inbar (ed.), *Regional Security Regimes. Israel and Its Neighbors* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press 1995) pp.175–97.
  25. See E. Inbar, 'The Nuclear Mirage in the Middle East', *Midstream* 27/3 (March 1981) pp.3–6; Yair Evron, *Israel's Nuclear Dilemma* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 1994).
  26. Egypt tried to force the issue by insisting on an Israeli adherence to the NPT, before its extension, instead of waiting for the establishment of a regional structure. For the chances of establishing such a regional security arrangement, see E. Inbar and S. Sandler, 'The International Politics of a Middle Eastern Arms Control Regime', in Efraim Inbar and Shmuel Sandler (eds.), *Middle Eastern Security. Prospects for an Arms Control Regime A BESA Study in Mideast Security* (London: Frank Cass 1995) pp.173–85.
  27. For their terrorist activities, see Anat Kurtz *et al.* (eds.), *Islamic Terror and Israel* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Papyrus and JCSS, Tel Aviv University 1993); M. Burkin, 'Terrorist Activity from Lebanon and the Threat to Northern Israel', in *The Middle East Military Balance. 1993–1994* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press for the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies 1994) pp.131–47.
  28. Meir Litvak, 'The Hamas Movement: A Different Palestinian Identity', in David Menashri (ed.), *Islamic Fundamentalism: A Challenge to Regional Stability* (Tel Aviv: Dayan Center, Tel Aviv University 1993) p.68.
  29. *Ha'aretz*, 1 Nov. 1994, p.A3.
  30. E. Rabin, 'We Have Played This Game Several Times,' *Ha'aretz*, 12 July 1993; R. Ben-Yishai, 'Lebanon: Why Does Israeli Government Show Restraint?,' *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, 12 Aug. 1994. For the general Israeli reluctance to use force because of the peace process, see E. Inbar and S. Sandler, 'Israel's Deterrence Strategy Revisited', *Security Studies* 3/2 (Winter 1993/94) pp.346–48.
  31. See *inter alia*, Barry Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics* (NY: St. Martin's Press 1990); E. Podeh, 'The Struggle of the Egyptian Regime Against the Islamic Challenge', *Ma'arachot* (Hebrew) 36/4 (June 1994) pp.40–8; and his 'Egypt's Struggle against the Militant Islamic Groups', in this volume, pp.43–61.
  32. For their political program and anti-western attitudes, see the interview with the secretary-

- general of the party, Oguzhan Asilturk, *Turkish Daily News*, 22 Nov. 1994, Section Two, p.1; see also Anat Lapidot, 'Islamic Activism in Turkey since the 1980 Military Takeover', in this volume, pp.62-74.
33. L. Tal, 'Dealing with Radical Islam: The Case of Jordan', *Survival* 37/3 (Autumn 1995) pp.139-56; See also G. Kramer, 'The Integration of the Integrist: a comparative study of Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia', in Ghassan Salame (ed.), *Democracy Without Democrats?* (London: I.B. Tauris 1994) pp.200-26.
  34. Bechor (note 18).
  35. For the relations between the PA and Hamas, see Menachem Klein, 'Competing Brothers: The Web of Hamas-PLO Relations', in this volume, pp.111-32.
  36. There are great difficulties in polling Palestinians. According to the poll results of the Center for Palestine Research and Studies (Nablus) released on 31 May 1994, support for Islamic groups in Gaza is approximately 20 per cent. Most other estimates are higher, but there seems to be a gradual erosion in the Islamic appeal in Palestine.
  37. Arafat allowed Hamas to open an information office and to publish a magazine, and released from prison many Hamas activists. See *Ha'aretz*, 29 Jan. 1996, p.A5.
  38. *Ha'aretz*, 28 Oct. 1994, p.A3.
  39. Eliyahu Kanovsky, *Assessing the Mideast Peace Economic Dividend*, BESA Mideast Security and Policy Studies No.15 (Ramat Gan: BESA Center for Strategic Studies 1994).
  40. Z. Schiff, 'After Nezarim', *Ha'aretz*, 15 Nov. 1994, p.B1.
  41. For the continuum in Israeli attitudes on national security and the Arab-Israeli conflict, see E. Inbar and G. Goldberg, 'Is Israel's Elite Becoming More Hawkish?', *International Journal* 45/3 (Summer 1990) pp.632-5; Efraim Inbar, *War and Peace in Israeli Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 1991).
  42. Shimon Peres with Arye Naor, *The New Middle East* (NY: Henry Holt 1993) p.46.
  43. For reduced threat perception and other components of the new Israeli strategic thinking, see E. Inbar, 'Contours of New Israeli Strategic Thinking', *Political Science Quarterly* 111/1 (Spring 1996) pp.41-65.
  44. For this term see Max Singer and Aaron Wildavsky, *The Real World Order. Zones of Peace/Zones of Turmoil* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House 1993). For Benjamin Netanyahu's view, see his *A Place Among the Nations* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Yedi'ot Aharonot 1995).
  45. Kanovsky (note 39).
  46. For the relations between economic ideas and international relations see R.Gilpin, 'Three Models of Future', *International Organization* 29/1 (Winter 1975) pp.37-63.
  47. Baruch Kimmerling, *The Interrupted System* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction 1985).
  48. Giora Goldberg, Gad Barzilai and Efraim Inbar, *The Impact of Intercommunal Conflict: The Intifada and the Israeli Public Opinion* Policy Studies no.43 (Jerusalem: The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations, The Hebrew University 1991); Asher Arian, *Security Threatened. Surveying Israeli Opinion on Peace and War* (Cambridge UP and the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University 1995).
  49. *Ha'aretz*, 30 Sept. 1994, p.A3. For the Syrian track, see E. Inbar, 'Israeli Negotiations with Syria', *Israel Affairs* 1/4 (Summer 1995) pp.89-100.
  50. See the poll results in *Ma'ariv*, 6 Jan. 1995, p.1; *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, 10 March 1995, p.1.
  51. The analysis of the elections is beyond the scope of this article. Netanyahu's razor-thin victory is primarily related to more effective campaigning and organization, and to a better ability to capture the center of the Israeli political map than Labor.
  52. E. Inbar and S. Sandler, 'The Changing Israeli Security Equation: Toward a Security Regime', *Review of International Studies* 21/1 (Jan. 1995) pp.41-59.
  53. See Inbar and Sandler, 'Israel's Deterrence Strategy Revisited' (note 30) pp.342-3; Gabriel Ben-Dor, 'Arab Rationality and Deterrence', in Aharon Klieman and Ariel Levite (eds.), *Deterrence in the Middle East*, JCSS Study no.22 (Boulder, CO: Westview 1993) p.97; Adam Garfinkle, 'An Observation on Arab Culture and Deterrence: Metaphors and Misgivings', in Inbar (note 24) pp.201-29.