Actually-existing Islamic movements and states

written by Richard Greeman | January 10, 2011

Editor's note: This is the seventh article in a series by Richard Greeman about Islamism. U.S. imperialism, deluded by its own ideology, has joined the March of Folly in Afghanistan/West Pakistan — following in the illustrious footsteps of other would-be conquerors including the Persian Emperor Darius I, Alexander the Great, the British Empire under Queen Victoria and Brezhnev's Soviet Russian empire. All these great powers lost whole armies in the region before being driven out by the fiercely independent natives, as we have seen in previous articles. The U.S. Government, dominated by powerful lobbies whose special interests trump the national interest, appears unable to change its irrational course. American imperialism justifies its dangerous and self-defeating policies through ideological constructs rooted in America's long history of conquest, projecting white American aggression outward onto a series of threatening 'others' from the 'Indians' to the 'Commies' and most recently the 'urgent threat' of 'Islamism, Islamo-fascism or […] radical Islam' (to quote the Times article with which we began our analysis). Having thus deconstructed and contextualized the contested concept of the Islamic 'threat,' we now have a more objective perspective from which to examine Islamism empirically, on the ground as it were. Here we must account for two distinct, but related geographical and political phenomena. 1) militant Islamic movements, parties and states in the Moslem Middle East/Arab world (ME/A for short) and 2) Islamic fundamentalism among immigrant or immigrant-descended youth in Western countries – to whom Islamic radicalism appeals as expression of their alienation, humiliation and need for cultural identity. Naturally these two strands are intertwined. Radical Islamic states and movements in the ME/A seek to influence and recruit among the Moslem diaspora in the West; they weave international propaganda networks aimed at gaining cultural and political hegemony over communities of often indifferent or irreligious Moslem immigrants, where family, cultural and emotional ties with the homeland nonetheless remain strong. Such networks may also be used to recruit militants for combat and suicide attacks among the disaffected masses of unemployed youth in the ME/A world and the frustrated, humiliated, educated elites in both Europe and the Moslem countries. Taken as a whole, these state and non-state actors form what has been described as a 'nebulous,' and the most striking thing about this nebulous is it's lack of internal unity and coherence. To begin with, the Islamic world with its 1. 6 billion inhabitants (1/5 of the world population) is itself as various as the so-called 'Christian-heritage' world with its right-wing Evangelicals and its politicized Vatican at one extreme and its vast un-churched European majority at the other. Similarly, Islam as it is lived and practiced by millions of South and East Asians has a much less significant political role than in the Middle East/Arab (ME/A) lands, where it has become the ideological expression of exacerbated nationalism and a vehicle to political power. And even within this geographical area, it is division – or rather violent schism – among Moslems that predominates over unity and coherence. The 1200-year rivalry between Shiite and Sunnite factions of Islam — each with its alliances of states and insurgent groups — reminds me of the European inter-Christian religious civil wars between Catholics and Protestants, which continued through the 17th Century here in France and were bloodier and more destructive than the Christian versus Moslem Crusades of the Middle Ages. And à propos of the Crusades, the fact that the Christians were organized under the Popes in a united Catholic Europe accounted for much of their success against the more civilized Moslems, who were divided, then as now. Indeed, since the 1980's the Sunni-Shiite rivalry for dominance of the ummah (the global community of Islam) has intensified with new revolutionary Shiite Islamic Republic of Iran challenging the dominance of Sunni fundamentalism. The Sunni counter-attack is centered around the Moslem holy cities of Mecca and

Median in the Islamic Monarchy of Saudi Arabia, where the Wahhabi clergy actually consider Shiites to be kaffirs (‘infidels’) and prefer the Americans. Meanwhile hundreds of millions of Moslems in South and East Asia practice traditional local forms of Islam with little regard to the bloody quarrels among Arabs and Iranians in faraway West Asia and North Africa.