Inventing Islam

In what concrete ways can it be said that the West "invents" what it calls Islamism ? Contemporary imperialism inadvertently spreads Islamic militantism by stirring up the ME/A hornets' nest through torture-camps and attacks on civilians. But Western agents have long supported Islamic movements in the region as a way to divert nationalism and democracy. Historically, the British Intelligence Service nurtured the Islamicist movement at its very origin. Said Aburish and Caroline Fourest among others have documented how the Moslem Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928, was encouraged by the British as a diversion against Egyptian secular movements for labor rights, democracy and national independence. Likewise, and the strict Wahhabi Islam of Saudi Arabia, encouraged by the British and then the Americans, has long been the main political prop of the despotic pro-Western Saudi monarchy — itself an invention of British colonialism. This convenient relationship provides immense royalties to the U.S./British oil companies operating in Saudi Arabia as well as lucrative sales of F-16's to protect the Saudi royals from their benighted subjects — an imperialist sweetheart deal if there ever was one. No one seems to notice that Saudi Arabia, like Hamas which it has historically financed, officially remains an Islamic state which still refuses to recognize the state of Israel. And although the Western media occasionally react to such barbaric incidents as the beheading of a young princess for the crime of kissing a boy, somehow the Saudi Wahhabi fundamentalist semi-theocracy is never counted under the heading "threat of political Islam." Proponents of this concept also conveniently forget that Osama bin Laden and most of his September 11 hijackers were Saudi subjects and that their avowed purpose was to expel from Saudi Arabia the U.S. bases, established during Bush I's Gulf War against Iraq, which were seen as polluting Islam's Holy places. Another "open secret" is the longstanding relationship between the

Bush and bin Laden clans which culminated in the expatriation to Saudi Arabia of dozens of bin Laden family members residing in the U.S. in the days following the 9/11 attacks — despite the grounding of all civilian aviation and without any FBI or other interrogation as to their possible knowledge of the attacks. Blood may be thicker than water, but oil is thicker than both. Where does Israel fit into this ideological picture ? I have always seen Zionism as a Hebrew remake of the American frontier movie transposed to Palestine, with the Arabs in the rôle of the Indians: a matzoh-ball Western called "How the East Was Won." Like the courageous Euro-American colonists occupying an "empty" American continent, the Zionists fulfilled their own Manifest Destiny in an "empty" Palestine by shooting and expropriating the natives. The Zionist settlers saw themselves as "a people without land in a land without people," creating a City on the Hill in the wilderness, making the desert bloom. The necessary ethnic cleansing was carried out by the same John Wayne methods : First encourage peaceful settlers to take over the natives' land ; then when the natives fight back and some settlers get killed, holler "atrocity" and send in the Cavalry to exterminate the savages or drive them into camps and barren reservations to rot in idleness. When necessary, negotiate treaties you have no intention of keeping. Above all, demonize the natives so as to prevent poor or disaffected settlers from fraternizing or running off with them. Soon the only "good" Indian or Arab becomes the "dead" Indian or Arab and democracy will bloom. To me the tragedy of both the Jewish and Arab peoples is to be led by violent, corrupt, reactionary, religiously-inspired ultra-nationalist leaders who more and more resemble their opposite numbers. Their reciprocal power depends on mutually maintaining a state of crisis so as to silence internal opposition. I think the term "clerico-fascism," originally applied to Franco's Phalange and applied below to the Islamic Republic of Iran, is one useful way of understanding some of these reactionary religio-nationalist movements and regimes. "Clerico-fascism" is a more general

(and less biased) term than than Washington's ideological stereotype of "Islamo-fascism" since it includes the symmetrical threats to peace and democracy posed by Zionist Judeo-fascism and the Christo-fascism of the Religious Right in the U.S. not to mention the Hindu fascists in India. I can only conclude that the most urgent "Islamic threat" on the horizon is probably the threat that America's irrational Crusade against Islamo-fascism will either explode into nuclear war or seal the doom of democracy in the U.S. — where the Judeo-Christian version of clerico-fascism is looming large.