

BOOK REVIEW/ *ULASAN BUKU*

**Civil Democratic Islam, Partners, Resources, and Strategies oleh
Cheryl Benard. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2003, pp.72.**

Reviewed by Ibrahim Abu Bakar

In relation to the Muslim countries or nations, one of the contemporary politico-economic and strategic issues for the United States of America (USA) is a civil democratic Islam. USA has looked for the partners among the Muslim nations but USA has not found a civil democratic Islam in any of the Muslim nations. For USA, the democratic system in the Muslim nations is different from the democratic system in USA. Some of the Muslim nations have accepted the democratic system like Turkey, Egypt, Malaysia, Pakistan, Iran, Sudan, Iraq, and Indonesia. The importance of the existence of a civil democratic Islam in the Muslim nations to USA and the West is undeniable. "Clearly, the United States, the modern industrialized world, and indeed the international community as a whole would prefer an Islamic world that is compatible with the rest of the system: democratic, economically viable, politically stable, socially progressive, and follows the rules and norms of international conduct."(p.ix).

According to the Preface in this book, "The United States has three goals in regard to politicized Islam. First, it wants to prevent the spread of extremism and violence. Second, in doing so, it needs to avoid the impression that the United States is 'opposed to Islam.' And third, in the long run, it must find ways to help address the deeper economic, social, and political causes feeding Islamic radicalism and to encourage a move toward development and democratization."(p.iii). Therefore, a research related to the Muslim views and attitudes to USA, the West and the democratic systems existed in the West and USA is suggested and supported by the Smith Richardson Foundation, RAND and National Security Research Division. This book contains the report from this kind of research done by Cheryl Benard (born in 1953). "This report should be of interest to scholars, policymakers, students, and all others interested in the Middle East, Islam, and political Islam."(p. iii).

The remark about the importance of this report is clearly stated in the Preface for this book. Is it so important? It is possibly so important for the

policymakers because they can introduce some policies related to the Muslim nations based on the report contained in this book. Moreover, there are the proposed strategies in the third chapter in this book. The strategies are normally for the policymakers, not for the scholars and students of the Middle East, Islam and political Islam.

Cheryl Benard writes her research report in three chapters and she provides four appendixes and bibliography. This book also has two-page glossary for 24 terms namely “burqa, fatwa, hadith, Hanafi, Hanbali, hijab, hudud, ijma, ijthad, khilafa, Kufr, madrassa, mullah, Quran, sharia, Shi`a Islam, Sufisim, Sunni Islam, sunnah, sura, Ulama, ummah and Wahhabi.”(pp. xv-xvi) (These terms are spelled as they are written in this book but the commas, and are added by this reviewer).

Who is a Wahhabi? Cheryl Benard in her glossary explains that a Wahhabi is “An extremist, puritanical, and aggressive form of Islamic fundamentalism founded in the 18th century and adopted by the house of Saud; disrespecting other versions of Islam, including Sufi Islam, Shi`a Islam, and moderate Islam in general as incorrect aberrations of the true religion. Its expansionist ambitions are heavily funded by the Saudi government.”(p. xvi). Based on this definition of a Wahhabi and his Wahhabism, USA has some political and international; relation problems with Saudi Arabia because it is shown and stated here that the Saudi government, “heavily funded” the expansionist ambitions of the Wahhabism in the 21st century.

The first chapter of this book is devoted to the discussed issues namely Democracy and Human Rights, Polygamy, Criminal punishments, Islamic justice, Women’s dress, and Husbands allowed to beat wives in the Muslim nations or countries or in the Muslim communities. Benard presents these issues in the first chapter based on the understanding and belief held by many categories or groups of Muslims namely Muslim fundamentalists, Muslim traditionalists, Muslim secularists, Muslim modernists and reformists. The fundamentalists are further classified into the Radical fundamentalists and the Scriptural fundamentalists. The traditionalists are further categorized into the Conservative traditionalists and Reformists traditionalists. The secularists are further divided into the Mainstream secularists and the radical secularists. The title for the first chapter is “Mapping the Issues: An Introduction to the Range of Thought in Contemporary Islam”(pp. 1-24).

The second chapter in this book is devoted to finding the partners for promoting democratic Islam and its options (pp. 25-46). For this chapter, Benard presents the Muslims groups and their views and beliefs regarding the western democratic system and democratic Islam. She begins with the secularists in the Muslim world. According to Benard, “Although there are some ambiguities, Western democracies are premised on the separation of church and state. It follows that the secularists should be our most natural allies in the Muslim

world.”(p. 25). However, there are critical problems with the secularists in the Muslim world because the Muslim world does not accommodate secularism as the western democracies have accommodated secularism and minority Muslims have accepted and advocated secularism in the Muslim world. Benard does not agree with the western theorists and policymakers who have assumed and conceived the problems with the secularists in the Muslim world. She proposes that the secularists in the Muslim world namely in Turkey “have managed to hold power, legitimacy, and even popularity, and secular movements have gained followings. One of the Islamic world’s most successful states, Turkey, achieved its progress through a policy of aggressive secularism.”(pp. 25-26).

Regarding the fundamentalists in the Muslim world, Benard states that “the radical fundamentalists are hostile to modern democracy, to Western values in general, and to the United States in particular; that their overall goals and visions are incompatible with ours; and that they oppose us and we oppose them.”(p. 27).

As regards the traditionalists in the Muslim world, Benard says that at first glance they “have several features that make them seem attractive as potential partners” for the promotion of democratic Islam. (p. 29). The traditionalists in the eyes of Benard have the following attractive features. “They are a useful counterweight to the fundamentalists, because they enjoy widespread public legitimacy in the eyes of Muslim populations. They tend to be more middle-of-the-road, more moderate, a calming influence. They are open to, and in fact often proactively seek, interfaith dialogue. They do not usually advocate violence, although some of them sympathize with fundamentalists who have chosen that path, to the point of sheltering them, providing them with resources, and abetting their activities.”(p. 29). As presented and seen by Benard here, the help or assistance extended by the traditionalists to the fundamentalists is the serious problem to make the traditionalists as the potential partners for promoting the democratic Islam in the Muslim world. Moreover, according to Benard, the traditionalists are problematic partners if they are chosen as the partners for the democratic Islam because their belief set “does not include democratic elements” For examples, “Modern democracy rests on the values of the Enlightenment; traditionalism opposes these values and sees them as a source of corruption and evil. Traditionalism is antithetical to the basic requirements of a modern democratic mind-set: critical thinking, creative problem solving, individual liberty, secularism... Modern democratic civil society will not support shari’a law; traditionalism requires it.”(p.33).

Finally, Benard discovers that the Muslim modernists in the Muslim world are the most suitable partners for promoting the democratic Islam. Benard clearly states, “The modernist vision matches our own. Of all the groups, this one is most congenial to the values and the spirit of modern democratic society. Modernism, not traditionalism, is what worked for the West.”(p. 37). Benard finds that Islamic modernism advocated by Islamic or Muslim modernists has

respected intellectuals and leaders at this period such as Mustafa Ceric, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia, Khaled Abou El Fadl, Professor of Islamic Law at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), Muhammad Shahrur, Serif Mardin, Fethullah Gulen, and Bassam Tibi (pp. 38-39). However, there are the apparent weaknesses of the modernists in their efforts “for developing and transmitting democratic Islam”. In comparison with the fundamentalists, the modernists are poorer financially and institutionally because the fundamentalists are “with enormous resources: money, infrastructure, weapons, media” and they “access to other platforms, control over educational and welfare institutions, etc.” In comparison with the traditionalists, the modernists are poorer and weaker financially and institutionally because the traditionalists “have a well-established power base that can include access to significant resources. They collect taxes; receive subsidies and donations; and have independent sources of revenue, such as businesses and foundations.” Moreover, the traditionalists have mosques, schools and social and welfare programs. “Both fundamentalists and traditionalists have their own publishing houses, radio and TV stations, schools, newspapers, etc. Modernists have nothing comparable.” In addition to these weaknesses of the modernists, many of them live politically and economically in the fundamentalist or the traditionalist environment. Therefore, the modernists “can be accused of apostasy, taken to court, prevented from writing and working, harassed in various ways, and even sentenced to death.”(p. 39).

The third chapter is the last chapter that contains a proposed strategy (pp. 47-48). Based on the second chapter that elaborates on the Muslim groups namely the fundamentalists, the traditionalists and the modernists and their beliefs and attitudes towards the civil democratic Islam, the third chapter proposes: “Support the modernist first, enhancing their vision of Islam over that of the traditionalists by providing them with a broad platform to articulate and disseminate their views. They, not the traditionalists, should be cultivated and publicly presented as the face of contemporary Islam. Support the secularists on a case-by-case basis. Encourage secular civic and cultural institutions and programs.”(p. 47).

Benard proposes to support “the traditionalists enough to keep them viable against the fundamentalists.... Within the traditionalists, we should selectively encourage those who are the relatively better match for modern society.”(p. 47)

Finally, Benard proposes to “oppose the fundamentalists energetically by striking at vulnerabilities in their Islamic and ideological postures, exposing things that neither the youthful idealists in their target audience nor the pious traditionalists can approve of: their corruption, their brutality, their ignorance, the bias and manifest errors in their application of Islam, and their inability to lead and govern.”(pp. 47-48).

The four appendixes provided in this book are “Appendix A THE HADITH WARS” (pp. 49-55), “Appendix B HIJAB AS A CASE STUDY” (pp.57-59), “Appendix C STRATEGY IN DEPTH”(pp. 61-64), and lastly, “Appendix D CORRESPONDENCE ABOUT THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE’S PORTRAYAL OF ISLAM”(pp. 65-66). The bibliography occupies from page 67 to page 72.

This book by Cheryl Benard is a useful model for a research carried out by her to achieve her stated goals namely to identify the partners among Muslims in promoting the civil democratic Islam among the Muslims and Muslim nations. It is a strategic book for the United States and the western nations on how to deal with Muslim secularists, fundamentalists, traditionalists or modernists living in the Muslim nations or living in the modern and secular nations like the European nations and the United States.

Her book is about Muslim secularists, fundamentalists, traditionalists and modernists as well as their beliefs and attitudes towards the issues presented in the first and second chapters. Based on their beliefs and attitudes on Islamic teachings on those issues, they are judged, categorized, and consequently connected with the United States, and the western nations in promoting the western democracies and civil societies.

This book is a very clear example of the western researchers and scholars to differentiate and classify or categorize the Muslims into the various categories based on their understandings and interpretations of Islam on certain issues especially the issues related to the relationship between Islam and democracy, Islam and human rights, Islam and gender, and Islam and secularism. The western nations have looked for the Muslim groups that are not hostile to them and could work with them in promoting their political and economic systems such as secularism, democracy, capitalism, individualism, constitutionalism, people power and parliamentary system as well as the human rights.

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