



CSIS REPORT

The Center for Strategic and International Studies  
and  
The World Jewish Congress

Seminar on

"RELIGIOUS FACTORS IN CONFLICTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST"

21 June 1979

A Report by  
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Conference Coordinator

RELIGIOUS FACTORS IN CONFLICTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

A seminar and discussion jointly  
sponsored by CSIS and the World Jewish Congress

2:00 - 5:00 p.m.  
June 21, 1979

Third Floor Conference Room  
The International Club Building  
1800 K Street, Northwest  
Washington, D.C.

Moderator - Ray S. Cline  
Director of Studies, CSIS

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| Israel Singer<br>Director<br>World Jewish Congress             | - "Religious Dimensions to<br>Middle East Conflict"     |
| Ambassador Robert Neumann<br>Senior Fellow, CSIS               | - "The New Rise of Islam"                               |
| Sister Ann C. Coffey<br>Sisters of St. Joseph<br>of Carondelet | - "Christianity in the<br>Middle East"                  |
| Arthur Hertzberg<br>Vice-President<br>World Jewish Congress    | - "The New Concept of Political-<br>Religion in Israel" |

Discussants

Viqar A. Hamdani  
U.N. Representative, World Muslim Congress

Benjamin Rivlin  
Director, Inter-University Consortium

NOVEMBER 1979

RAY CLINE

Ray S. Cline is Executive Director, World Power Studies, at CSIS. He is also Adjunct Professor of International Relations in the School of Foreign Service, Georgetown, and Adjunct Professor at the Defense Intelligence School.

Dr. Cline served for more than 30 years in several U.S. government agencies, mostly in Washington but also abroad. The highest level posts in which he served were Deputy Director for Intelligence in the Central Intelligence Agency from 1962 to 1966 and Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State from 1969 to 1973. He was awarded the CIA Distinguished Intelligence Medal and the Career Intelligence Medal.

Dr. Cline, who holds A.B., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees from Harvard University, also studied at Balliol College, Oxford University. Among his most recent publications are Secrets, Spies and Scholars: A Blueprint of the Essential CIA (1976, Acropolis Books Ltd., Washington, D.C.) and World Power Assessment, 1977 (Westview Press, Inc., Boulder, Colorado).

SISTER ANN C. COFFEY, CSJ

Sister Ann C. Coffey, CSJ, holds a B.A. in English and History from the College of St. Catherine, an M.A. in Modern European History from Marquette, and is a Ph.D. candidate in Islamic History at the University of Wisconsin. She has also studied International Relations and Latin American, Oriental, and African Civilizations at Columbia University, and has worked on Islamic languages at the University of Chicago, University of Michigan, and the Middle East Centre for Arabic Studies at Shemlan, Lebanon.

Having spent several years in archival research and travel in Europe and the Middle East, Sister Coffey is completing a study of the "Interrelationships of the Judaic, Islamic, and Christian Communities in Nineteenth Century Jerusalem," and is working on a translation project of the Ottoman Chronicles. Sister Coffey has served as a consultant to Middle Eastern universities and has made evaluative missions to Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank for the Pontifical Mission for Palestine. Before entering the Middle Eastern field, Sister Coffey taught, supervised, and administered programs in American and European history.

### RABBI ARTHUR HERTZBERG

Arthur Hertzberg, in addition to being Rabbi at Temple Emanuel in Englewood, New Jersey, is a distinguished historian and author. He is a Professor of History at Columbia University, Vice-President of the World Jewish Congress, and former President of the American Jewish Congress. Rabbi Hertzberg, founder of the American Jewish Policy Foundation, is the author of many highly regarded books, including The Zionist Idea and his newest book, Being Jewish in America.

### ROBERT NEUMANN

Robert G. Neumann currently serves as Senior Associate for Parliamentary/Congressional Relations at CSIS. He was former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, 1966-1973, and U.S. Ambassador to Morocco, 1973-1976.

Educated both in Europe and in the United States, Ambassador Neumann received his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. From 1947-1970 he taught at the University of California in Los Angeles, attaining the rank of full professor in 1958. Ambassador Neumann served as Director of the Institute of International and Foreign Studies at UCLA from 1958-1965, and Chairman, Atlantic and West European Program, 1965-1966.

Ambassador Neumann has served as consultant to both the Departments of State and Defense, as well as several non-governmental organizations and corporations. A prolific writer, his articles have appeared in numerous professional journals in this country and abroad. Included among his most recent awards are Grand Officer, Order and Star of Ouissam Alaoui, Morocco, and Commander's Cross, Order of Merit, Germany.

### ISRAEL SINGER

Israel Singer is Director of the World Jewish Congress. He was Deputy Chairman of the Department of Judaic Studies at Brooklyn College, 1974-1978 whereby he also taught in the Department of Political Science. Professor Singer taught political theory at Barilan University, 1970-1972. From 1972-1973 he was a special assistant to the Commissioner in the New York Department of Human Resources, during the Lindsay administration.

A native of Brooklyn, Professor Singer was educated at the City University of New York. He is a musmach (ordained rabbi) of the Yeshiva Torah Vodaat, New York.



Dr. Cline opened the seminar emphasizing that he is Director of World Power Studies at CSIS and would attempt to moderate this unique discussion focusing on how religious factors in the Middle East -- Jewish, Moslem, and Christian -- affect perceptions of power and political clout in international relations.

"We feel we are entering a period when we must do a little more to crank in an appreciation of the cultural elements in these conflicts in addition to the ones in which we more commonly spend our time -- political, economic, and military," said Dr. Cline.

### Professor Israel Singer

Professor Singer suggested that Secretary General Brezhnev's recent slip in referring to the "help of God" in a sense "opened a new era for the world with respect to what may be going on in the East." The Pope's influence during his trip to Poland may have extended as far as the Presidium of the Soviet Union," he added.

Singer suggested it is popular to think that modernization has superceded religion. The era of the death of God, raised by Neitzsche, discussed by Heidegger, and celebrated by modern theologians, has come into question during recent years. "God seems to have been resuscitated by some means," noted Singer.

Throughout the Middle East there are landmark religious movements -- for example, the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria -- quite different from those modernization theoreticians have prophesized.

In Israel there is also taking place a great upsurge in religious feeling, a translation of religious beliefs into political activities "which have endangered the entire region." Singer emphasized that the settlements in the occupied territories -- said to be strictly for security reasons -- definitely have religious overtones, the claim to the land being made on the basis of "religious fiat."

While early Zionists did not come to Israel to establish settlements on religious grounds alone, those who come today do. In this sense, religion can take on an ethnocentric aspect, "a kind of in-group, out-group relationship," Singer suggested. "And people with a need to love each other in the group have a special need to reject those outside the group."

Some of the instances of religious revival in the Middle East today may be termed "national religion," or "ethnocentric religious resuscitations," rather than sacred phenomena, Singer continued. For instance, the best way to be a good Iranian may be to follow temporarily the Ayatollah against the Shah. The way to be a good Israeli, to many Jews, is to follow the National Religious Party in building West Bank settlements. The way to be a good Pole is to follow the Pope and thus indirectly reject Soviet influence in Eastern Europe.

The distinction between national religion and true religion is crucial because it suggests that the resurgence of religion among middle class circles in modernizing countries may be only skin deep and temporary -- a means of identifying with one group against another at a particular historical and political time, Singer concluded.

#### Ambassador Robert Neumann

Ambassador Neumann opened his discussion by suggesting that what looks like a resurgence of Islam may very likely be but a new attention to what has always been. "The political amplifications, however, go with the events of the times and therefore show new manifestations," Ambassador Neumann noted.

The great majority of Moslems live east of the Khyber Pass in northwest Pakistan," Ambassador Neumann pointed out. "In other words, most Moslems are not where you think they are."

In order to put Islam in perspective, Ambassador Neumann outlined some of the tenets of that religion.

Islam means submission to the will of God and is taken from the submission of Abraham. Mohammed is deemed the last and greatest prophet in a long line including Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Christ. Mohammed may be better described as "messenger" than as "prophet," keeping in mind that Islam is guided by the word of God and Mohammed is but the messenger.

The sources of Islam are the Koran, the word of God as revealed to the prophet Mohammed; the Hadib, the traditions of the faith that have nearly the same derivation; and the Sharia, the code of law derived from the Koran and Hadib and comparable to catechisms (descriptions of right conduct as well as actions condemned).

Originally, up through the third century, there was some opportunity for evolution through a process of consensus and individual interpretation. But soon orthodox Islam, especially of the Sunni variety, came to hold that the evolution of the faith has been completed just as the works of God's creation are completed.

Orthodox Islam did not create a state in the modern sense. Successors to the prophet combined both spiritual and temporal powers and the concept that comes closest to statehood is that of Uma, community of believers.

By the tenth century the unity of temporal and spiritual on which the theologians rightly insisted, was broken in practice as the sultans, emirs, and others cut into the authority of the Caliphate. A kind of political arrangement, a concordat, then arose between the temporal and spiritual authorities for sharing power. A priesthood evolved with the task of molding these arrangements together. (Actually, a formal priesthood only exists on the Shiite side of Islam and not on the Sunni side.) Compromises took place between different tendencies of interpretation of Islamic law and different arrangements between spiritual and temporal authorities arose.

According to Shiah tradition, the holy word of God was passed to the prophet Mohammed and then, not to his immediate successors as the Sunnis believe, but to his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, from whom it has gone to a number of successors known as Imams.

The Shiah organization shows all the signs of being a minority. The original Imams were not Persians but Arabs; the Persians realized that the Shiah branch of Islam gave them an exceptional opportunity to strengthen their minority position.

Until the disappearance of the Imams in 1873, a series of Imams were credited with sinlessness and infallibility. No further transition of this authority took place, but what did survive is a Shiite feeling that legitimate authority can only come from a fusing of ecclesiastic and temporal power. Thus, a built-in conflict exists between Shiite (in contrast to Sunni) organized clergy and national authority.

It has been said that Iran can be ruled if clergy is either in full charge or pushed aside, but otherwise it becomes ungovernable.

What caused the long-existing conflict in Iran to break into the open, Ambassador Neumann suggested, was not "a religious resurgence as such." Rather, its cause was "the result of westernization, the strains, the alienation of people who were taken out of a perhaps more primitive (as we would put it) society into one which they did not understand, which did not accomplish the unrealistic expectations people had, who felt alone and rootless and who found the strong impulses of Islam, in whatever form, to be that cave to which they could return. That in turn provided a political platform for those who were already in conflict for a long number of years with the temporal authorities. This formed the rallying call for all kinds of other opposition elements which may or may not have had any ties with religion."

Islamic fundamentalism -- whether in Sunni or Shiite form -- draws popular appeal not so much from religion as from "social development," Ambassador Neumann continued. The trend is in evidence everywhere, but is in a particularly advanced stage only in Iran. These divisions should not hide the fact that there is a great communality in Islam because there is no division between the realm of Caesar and the realm of God -- the hurt inflicted to one being felt by the other.



Ambassador Neumann concluded by noting that hundreds of years ago western society was pulled apart by religious forces just as Islam today is in turmoil. All Moslems today are troubled that their third holy place is not in their hands, just as Christians were troubled in the Middle Ages when Islam occupied the holy places in Jerusalem. Medieval Christianity is only a vague comparison, however, for the religious dimensions of Moslem faith in today's Islamic World -- providing "a very strong political force which one can overlook at one's peril."

#### Sister Ann Coffey

Sister Coffey offered an in-depth view of two Christian communities in the Middle East -- the Maronites in Lebanon, the largest community; and the Catholics in Jerusalem, probably the most influential. In all, throughout the region, there are more than 20 Christian sects, she noted.

The origins of the Maronite Church are fifth century, during the lifespan of St. Meron. In the eighth century, when the Moslems thrust northward, the monastery and tomb of St. Meron were destroyed and the Maronites went into the mountains where they were largely undisturbed by either the Arabs or the Ottomans for about a thousand years.

Two continuing features of the Maronites existence are their unity with Rome and their strong ties with France. Historically a very strong affection has developed between the Holy Sea and the Maronites, as they are one of the few eastern groups to maintain their allegiance with Rome.

In the early nineteenth century, Ottomans began putting financial demands on the peoples of the area and, for a variety of additional reasons, the Maronites became stronger while the Druse sect weakened.

Sectarian differences became exacerbated and a delicate balance between Christians, Moslems, and Druse evolved. Social transformations intensified in 1832 when Egypt, supported by France, loosed Ibrahim

Pasha and the forces of modernization and the West on Lebanon. Religious autonomy was granted to the Maronites and the Druse, but by 1841 sectarian disorders brokeout. Ottoman pressures began to intensify their problems, especially as Moslem leadership from the cities became predominant.

Today, the leader of the Maronites is the Patriarch who is elected by the Metropolitans and the Bishops.

Gradually, the Maronite clergy began to see the Maronites as a nation, and the clergy began to challenge the political and social arrangements of Lebanon. Between 1857 and 1860 there was a sectarian slaughter even worse than that which followed more than 100 years later in the mid-1970s. Both a class and religious struggle, it provided a cover under which France dispatched 6,000 troops. Thus many of the currents of recent Lebanese history flow from the events and tensions of prior centuries.

The popular notion that events in Lebanon during the past few years can be explained as a religious war is a highly simplistic one. "Like the violence of the 1860s, the violence of the 1970s resulted again from a power vacuum, from a lack of effective government control at a time of rapid social change. The static quality of the system of confessionalism made the political and social modernization that was necessary really impossible."

And just as a century ago the internal tensions were exacerbated by the international situation, after 1968 Israel's reaction to Palestinian raids, by devastating and depopulating southern Lebanon, humiliated the entire country.

Again, the Maronite clergy assumed leadership of the people during this time of strife, and Sister Coffey went on to describe the personalities in charge. Other Christian groups -- some of whom had at times been aligned with the left -- came to realize that if the Maronite presence were threatened in Lebanon so would the presence of all Christian groups be threatened.

One of the reasons world Catholics do not aid the Lebanese Maronites more substantially is because Western Catholics do not fully understand the Eastern church. Also, for most Catholics, politics and religion are not one. But the Eastern church views itself as a bridge to an alien culture nevertheless.

The Catholic community of Jerusalem and the West Bank has many of the same qualities as the Maronites, but with roots in the Vatican II tradition of Europe and America. It is not a political community, but it could become so. This community knows how to use religion for promoting human, social, and political rights. "it is a community which could very easily mobilize Catholicism," Sister Coffey concluded.

#### Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg

"Zionism is political religion -- not only in its hardline formulation, but even in its most gentle form," Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg began his talk.

Zionism cannot be understood, including what is called "secular Zionism," unless you understand it as part of the history of Jewish religion, Rabbi Hertzberg continued. "Zionism is not a secular movement in the very midst of its secularity" -- Golda Meir, for instance, was bathed in the aura of a secular, Jewish Papacy.

The emotions of Jewish politics are those really of religious debate -- of schism and rebellion.

The fundamental Jewish preoccupation for 20 centuries has been powerlessness and its corollary, passivity. The prayer book is full of passages asking when the punishment for our sins will end, why are we in exile?

This powerlessness became particularly troubling at various times in Jewish history after it resulted in catastrophe. After 1492, and the end of Jewish society in Spain, a few false messiahs rose up. After 1648, Eastern European Jewry was decimated and another false messiah rose up promising to send the Jews to the Holy Land by cabalistic means.

The origins of Zionism are in theological discussion -- it is permissible to make an end of the exile of nonpassive, political means. Until the Hitler era, this remained a minority movement, but the tragic results of Jewish passivity and powerlessness changed that.

Zionism is essentially a religious revolt against the rabbinic authority that has traditionally counseled against attempting to hasten by man-made means the messiah and the return to Eretz Yisrael. "Zionism is a revolt against the religious passivity of the establishment. The notion that Zionism is the incantation or the secular continuity of the older religious tradition is a modern misconception." Rather, "Zionism as secularization is the assertion that what Jewish religion commands today is the creation of the messianic era" today.

Since the powerlessness of Jews was symbolized by anti-semitism, the means of ending anti-semitism became a question for a secularist like Herzl -- an anti-religious Jew whose children were not even circumcized. "To Zionist rabbis, I almost said Ayatollah," Hertzberg jested, "the creation of Israel was the beginning of the root of our redemption." Thus building settlements is fulfillment of God's wish -- redemption of the holy soil. The founding of a settlement such as Elon Moreh is for these people like the founding of Tel Aviv only 70 years ago -- "Elon Moreh, next to Nablus, is the planting of the next Tel Aviv which in 70 years will have hundreds of thousands of Jews." People like these admit they do not know where the Jews will come from. But they remember that German Jews in the 30s came to provide a hundred thousand new settlers.

"Once you are into messianic politics," Hertzberg suggested, "then everything done by Gush Emunim and Arik Sharon makes absolute sense. And it won't be stopped except by force majeure. It's not going to be stopped by ideological debate. It's going to be stopped only by the inner dialectic of the political process. Because insane though it may appear, it is perfectly logical within the context of messianic politics."



Hertzberg concluded with a warning, by way of parable, that religious fanaticism could lead to more tragedies for the Jewish people. "When Satan wants to destroy the world he seduces man not with sinful deeds," Hertzberg suggested. "If Satan sends you to do a sinful deed you will obviously reject it. He seduces man into destroying the world by putting it into his head to do what is clearly a good and holy deed and to do it at the wrong time, in the wrong context, and thus to be totally destructive."

Hertzberg added that it would be necessary to go "beyond our convictions with pragmatic attitudes or else the Middle East cannot possibly be saved." He referred to the other kind of Zionism, the majority tradition represented by Chaim Weizman, as a "counter-tradition of building and adjusting." "This is the tradition being challenged in Israel right before our eyes," Hertzberg concluded.

At the conclusion of these four presentations, two special guests -- Viqar A. Hamdani, UN Representative of the World Muslim Congress; and Benjamin Rivlin, Director of the Inter-University Consortium -- opened over an hour of discussion.

#### Dr. Viqar A. Hamdani

Dr. Hamdani began by noting that he fully agreed with Ambassador Neumann's comment that rather than a new rise of Islam there was a new attention being paid to Islam, especially in the United States because of oil.

Though differences do exist within Islam, fundamentally, all of Islam is one as a religion, Dr. Hamdani stressed -- in the West differences between various branches in Islam are often overemphasized.

The real source of conflict within Islam has to do with the fact that in many countries the wealth has often not filtered down to the masses. Consequently, there is social upheaval, most notably at this time in Iran. Modernization had not reached the masses.

As to the future, Dr. Hamdani suggested that "certain experiments are going on for modernization, for the application of Islam." In Pakistan, for example, very serious efforts are underway "to put Islam into the modern world."

I would suggest that the West give them a chance," Dr. Hamdani concluded. "Do not smother that at the very beginning by ridicule, by saying that chopping off of hands is backwards... Let the principles of Islam apply... Islam has always been with the West, and with the help of the West, Islam can be a modernizing force."

#### Dr. Benjamin Rivlin

Dr. Rivlin also indicated his agreement with Ambassador Neumann and Dr. Hamdani that the role of modernization and Westernization in Islam was the key subject for discussion. Dr. Rivlin noted the great orientalist Hamilton Gibb's view that wherever Islam came into contact with Western ideas a serious psychological derangement set into society -- traditional society was undermined and a process of modernization was put into motion.

If Gibb were alive today, Dr. Rivlin suggested, he might rephrase his thought along this line: Wherever modernization and Westernization came into contact with Islam a serious derangement took place within people of Islam who had become Westernized. For Western liberalism and democratic thought set a tall order for themselves in attempting to replace sacred revelation and supernatural belief systems with human secularization and humanly discovered science. "It was promising humanity a kind of heaven on earth by pursuing the teachings of science."

This Westernization however was only skin deep in many areas of Islam. The derangement Gibb spoke of took place in a very small group of the elite, not in the villages and remote areas where religion has remained the focal point of traditional society throughout the Middle East. This is what people remain attached to.

A disaffection with science, with modernization, is now setting in. Science has been unable to deliver to the masses on its promises. Through the world, science has in fact created problems -- fallout, radiation, war, and technology -- disturbing to human values.

In regard to Dr. Hamdani's insistence that "Islam is one," Dr. Rivlin suggested that there really is something new in what Ayatollah Khomeini is doing in Iran. In many Islamic countries the Sharia is a part of the law. In Shiite Iran, Khomeini is trying to introduce a system where the religious element is above the law. This is in contrast to the Sunni conception between the Caliph and the religious authorities. In Egypt, for example, religion is quite important, but government is not in the hands of religious authorities, and Friday prayers are said in the name of the Caliph.

Finally, as Dr. Hertzberg suggested, religion has to be separated from politics if certain Middle Eastern problems are to be soluble, Dr. Rivlin noted. For instance, the Jewish religious claim to Judea and Samaria must be abandoned; but so must the Arab religious claim to Jerusalem. "We need a political solution to these problems in terms of the Twentieth Century, not in terms of claims going back 2000 years," Dr. Rivlin concluded.

Participants

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CSIS

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Wolf Blitzer  
Jerusalem Post

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Mark Bruzonsky  
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