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Why the Arab Researchers Center (ARC)?

An Objective Effort to Study Jihadist Fundamentalism

The world has certainly changed since September 11, 2001 as it went to war against an amorphous enemy described as `terrorism` under American leadership with the participation of most countries. Yet it was a loose interpretation of the term terrorism that the US Government promoted through the dictum of `those who are not with us are definitely against us`. Consequently, the `war on terror` effectively became a war against Arabs, Muslims, Islam, Islamic and nationalistic groups, and against all those seeking to rid themselves of hegemony, colonialism, and tyranny.

The received viewpoint on terrorism was then operationalized into a working strategy with the benefit of a Western culture revolving around the principle of power and pragmatism in dealing with the other. Henceforth, it became easy to apply direct force and to undertake broad security and military interventions abroad as in Afghanistan and Iraq. Similarly, it became easy to launch wars by proxy, as in Southern Lebanon in the summer of 2006. Moreover, further interferences of one form or another are became widely anticipated in other regions of the world such as Iran. While in the Gaza Strip, allies in the `war on terror` were supplied with the necessary weaponry, intelligence, and financing to pursue certain policies.

As should be expected by rational human beings everywhere, many of those interventions were met by local groups opposing occupation or American policies with the same logic of force that seemed to justify them. This sort of reaction effectively curtailed military interventions somewhat leaving a great deal of room for American and Western research centers and think tanks affiliated with intelligence services and decision-making institutions to plunge into the business of `containing Islamism`. Devising strategies to achieve this goal became paramount especially since brute force could not defeat or at least subdue this Islamic phenomenon. Subsequently, such research centers and think tanks proceeded to differentiate between a `moderate` and an `extremist` Islam in an attempt to co-opt the former and quell the latter without ever relinquishing the overarching goal of exercising control and hegemony.

Yet if some research centers have relatively succeeded in tackling certain aspects of Islamist phenomena, they still failed in diagnosing such phenomena in their entirety, and especially in making sense out of the phenomenon of Jihadist fundamentalism. In fact they will continue to suffer from systematic shortcomings as long as their diagnosis is based on the techniques and research tools produced by Western culture. And just like it is unreasonable to try to fathom Western thought by through Islamic approaches and techniques, it is even more unreasonable to try to fathom Islamist phenomena by the way of Western approaches and techniques. Methodically speaking, it is more appropriate to depart from the premises that understanding Islam and the phenomenon of Jihadist fundamentalism in particular should be attempted only with the very tools and means which Islam produced and defended for so many centuries. So the question here is not: how does the West read and understand us? It is: how do we read and understand ourselves so the other may understand us accordingly? And this is regardless of whether the `readings` we present are acceptable or not to anyone involved.

In short, the lack of appropriate tools is why we in the "Arab Researchers Center" think the United States and the West failed to understand Islam and all Islamic phenomena beyond it. And while we concern ourselves with the totality of these phenomena, with all of the diversity and variety of groups involved, and while we intend to study them in the light of our culture and Islamic civilization, we emphasize without any qualification that our primary focus will center on the phenomenon of Jihadist fundamentalism per se. Such

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