Man is kind enough except when excited by religion (Mark Twain)

In Italy there are 60 kinds of sauces but only one Religion; In England, however there is only one sauce but 60 religions (18th century Italian Diplomat)

My favorite: “Sometimes it is better to know some of the questions than all of the answers” (James Thurber)

It is in the later spirit that I wish to address this symposium.

Intelligence supports Diplomacy and guides preparation for peace and war. Simply put, it involves the getting and processing of information for policy and decision-makers. Over the past hundred yeas, it has become ever more complex, and over the last 20 years it has become much more involved with religious issues than it was during the Cold War.

As for war, those who seek to focus primarily on peace, should
consider carefully the following comment by Leon Trotsky, The Red Army commander approaching St. Petersburg in 1919 as he addressed a delegation of townsmen who told him they were not interested in war:

“YOU may not be interested in war, but war is interested in YOU!

Religion and policy-makers are not often happy bedfellows. Religious folk often argue for pacifist policies, calling policy-makers “insensitive and ungodly.” while politicians and statesmen slight the moral issues involved, calling Christians “ naïve” and “unrealistic.”

Reinhold Niebuhr mustered some agreement on Christian Realism in the 1950’s and 60’s, but in America in the “Naughty Oughts (00’s) the NeoCons tried to bring the US back to the goal of Empire and practiced disdain of others which led us into Iraq and ultimately today Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia, Welcome to the Middle East!!

However, the root links between Religion and /Intel, go further back than that:

Religion has affected the gathering of intelligence since Biblical times and spies were sent into Jericho. Beginning after World War II and the rise of the state of Israel,
however, religion began to become a direct political issue for the first time since the Middle Ages. The 1979 Iranian revolution brought this development to center stage, forcing student and practitioners of diplomacy to begin to study the interaction more carefully. The intelligence community has understood some of this at the tactical level, but like the diplomatic community, has been slow to comprehend how fundamentally religion changes geostrategic considerations, hinders collection, impacts analysis, and changes the nature of covert operations.

Throughout the 1990’s several bombings, kidnappings, and random terrorist activities topped by the Sept. 11, 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center brought this issue home at both the strategic levels of politics, and intelligence. My basic thesis is that BOTH intelligence practitioners and policy makers need to shift their paradigms substantially to meet the needs of their consumers at all levels, and to clear trails upward to those who affect the direction of national policy.

Policy and decision-makers, on the other hand have to learn how to understand the implications of what they are being told.
Following the rise of Westphalian diplomacy in the 17 and 18th centuries, wars of religion gave way to wars of national interest, as nationalism superceded religion as the principal reason for fighting. Conventional wisdom up to and beyond World War II held that religion was only peripherally relevant to diplomacy, if and when it became related to national issues.\(^1\) Under the existing rationalist paradigm that developed, “modernization” brought about a secularization of society, which would reduce the influence of religion as a category.\(^2\) Following World War II and the emergence of some 130 new nations in the following 50 years, however, religion began to ease into a much greater role than before and its expanding impact has not been well understood.

The creation of Israel in 1948, even though under secular government, and its subsequent struggle to exist in peace with Arab states developed into a major ongoing conflict in a particularly sensitive region of the world. As time has passed, what began as a battle for national existence took on a religious dimension that produced a continued breeding ground for terrorist groups. Some of these later evolved into nationalist groups favoring a Palestinian state, but the religious dimension spread out
into other areas. Terrorism became a cottage industry across the region, and took on overtones of state and revolutionary strategy.\textsuperscript{3}

Ayatollah Khomeini’s rise to power in Iran in February 1979 brought aggressive anti-western Islamic fundamentalism to power in a key state of the Middle East. In the subsequent 30 years that, plus the evolution of conflict in Afghanistan as well as the rising Arab-Israeli dispute, reemphasized to many in the Islamic world the conflict between Islam and Christianity since the time of the crusades. As Islamic societies have become progressively less capable of dealing with the modern world, the increased the amount of hatred transformed into Islamic radicalism, supporting a number of radical movements.\textsuperscript{4}

The most well-known of these movements, the Taliban and Al Quaeda, are the groups behind most of the serious terror incidents against the U.S. in the 1990’s: the 1993 attack on the New York World Trade Center, the 1996 bombing of the Kobar Towers complex in Saudi Arabia, the 1998 bombings of U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Dar es Salaam, and the 2000 attack on the USS Cole. The warm-ups, as it were, to the destruction of the World Trade
Center on Sept. 11, 2001.

In the Western response to the “war against terror” after 9/11, warlike action gained precedence over conflict resolution and diplomacy. The Bush Team carried out a defensive counterattack against Afghanistan and then, with that battle not yet completely finished, broke with American tradition by waging a preemptive war against Iraq. Diplomacy’s skills of precise thought, temperate language and efforts to understand the legitimate interests of the “other,” even a religious other, were given a back seat.

Even before 9/11, however, there were some materials available, but these were not “big enough on the radar” to attract much attention. An American intelligence officer, writing anonymously in late 2001, urged all Americans, not just his own intelligence colleagues, “to understand the historical and religious context in which Bin Laden has acted and in which [the Taliban] emerged.”

Contemporary works on intelligence reform have been little better—David Steele at least refers to the categories of religious opposition groups in his two books, but William Odom concentrates entirely on technical and management issues in his new work on the subject. Robert Jervis, in
his new book *Why Intelligence Fails*, goes even further into the organizational impediments to dealing with a new subject. When I served in Iran with the US State Department as the Shah fell, it became clear that Washington folks were reading our stuff without picking up the new and more dangerous implications.

In fact, one of the principal disconnects in the foreign policy/decision making process has been the growing gap between regional specialists in diplomacy, the military and the intelligence branches and technical and geostrategic thinkers and ideologues. This is most evident in the unfolding of America’s counter-terrorist policy in the period from February/March 2002 to 2008.

After an initial focus on Afghanistan from September 2001 to the Battle of Tora Bora in early 2002, the neoconservative group clustered around Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith in the Defense Department began to implement the strategy of “democratizing” the Middle East. These individuals did so without regard for the views of the regional specialists in both the State and Defense Departments, as well as the vast majority of American academia. They didn’t allow any to go to Iraq!

The result was as sad as it was predictable: The Iraqis
were overjoyed to see Saddam gone, but they did not immediately and docilely flock to the American banner, as the NeoCons insisted they would. With too few troops to lock the country down, security quickly became and remained a severe problem (especially since the regional specialists who had been working on Iraq for over a year were kept off the first governing authority team). Then ethnic and religious forces began to jockey for power and build their own paramilitary forces.

The Coalition Governing Authority (CGA), established in October, 2003, under former Ambassador Paul Bremer, struggled (with some success) to improve matters, then went lame. Bremer took the catastrophic steps of disbanding the army and civil service, putting hundreds of thousands of discontents on the streets. In the meantime foreign terrorist forces, including Al Quaida and Al-Ansar, sent enough people into Iraq and built up and organized irregular forces, which the United States government acknowledged, as of February 2004 to be between 3,000 and 5,000 insurgents. These groups significantly disrupted Iraqi rebuilding efforts with sabotage, particularly of the oil industry, and attacks on citizens, aid personnel and Coalition authority. This did not diminish
until the 2007-2008 Surge of 30,000 more troops under Gen Petraeus,

Intelligence efforts, especially collaborations with local factions, produced the capture of Saddam Hussein on December 14, 2003 and his subsequent execution, but that did not notably diminish insurgent activity.

There was very little publicized luck in targeting other insurgent forces. Killings did not drop appreciably until the President left office, and the President’s popularity plummeted, continuing to a all-time low just before he returned to private life in January, 2009.

Given the lack of serious intelligence traction on the problem, coupled with the issue of “cooking” intelligence to suit the Neoconservatives over the question of Iraq’s possession of weapons of mass destruction, the stage was set for a witch-hunt as matters continued to deteriorate. The CIA had three different station chiefs in Baghdad supervising very large missions, yet a critical shortage of qualified, language-trained officers to do the intelligence work.

Regardless of the outcome, the lesson is clear: diplomatic, assistance and intelligence efforts have been severely hampered by underestimating the impact of
American action or inaction in an environment which is not very well understood. Principal reasons, were the lack of high level understanding of: 1) Religion’s impact on the overall world view of key groups and individuals; 2) the way in which belief structures are driven by religion; 3) the organizational impact of faith issues and religious organizations on both friend and foe; and 4) special issues that religion poses for intelligence.

Let's explore these points, not only for their relevance to Islam, but also Hinduism and Buddhism. The same issues consistently creep into problems involving most highly religious communities, especially where religion becomes either a directly supporting or challenging feature of the political landscape.

Religion’s impact on key groups and individuals’ world views

Faith and religious beliefs always play a role in people’s perception of issues and what is appropriate action. In the Islamic case, the perception of political and social reverses over the past two centuries has promoted a feeling of humiliation and desire to strike back. In other
areas, such as the Balkans, religion often became tied to ethnic and national issues, a particularly heady potion. The socioeconomic failure of regimes in the Middle East and elsewhere has created a sense of fear and anger that has contributed to this malaise. The young in Iran, Egypt, Algeria and many other places feel their situation is hopeless—no jobs, little hope. They then turn to attacking those governments, many of which have good relations and ties to the United States.

Bin Laden, for example, has so shaped his view of Islam that he justifies war against women and children—specifically prohibited in the Koran. To argue with such individuals, one has to understand the roots of their beliefs—which also really requires a good grounding in one’s own faith—or one cannot penetrate others’ selective use of scripture that is used to pervert the real meaning. Thus religious doctrine becomes a direct political tool.

Somewhat different and less extreme in practice are the Hindu nationalist policies of the BPJ in India, which formed a government in the mid-1990’s. Hinduism generally has the most flexible doctrine of the major religions, but the success of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which formed a government in the mid-1990s, mixed
Hindu doctrine/theology with political need to increase its political support. This enabled some larger issues to be resolved in practice, but also promoted communalism in certain areas, and a tendency to see the “other” solely as an enemy, and this led to the destruction of the Muslim Ahodya temple by a Hindu mob in 1992, and eventually the party’s loss of power.

Similarly, the rise of Sinhalese Buddhist fundamentalism in Sri Lanka and the reaction of the resultant Tamil guerilla nationalist force, the Tamil Tigers, mixed religion with politics to foment a bloody 27-year civil war, that ended with the destruction of the Tigers last November. The politico-religious mix on both sides of this fight made peacekeeping exceptionally difficult—since there are no interests to blend and compromise, only ethno-religious doctrine buttressing implacable stances on both sides.

The Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland depended for its strength on its own interpretation of Catholic theology, as do the parties to various Balkan disputes. The winding down of the Irish conflict is an excellent example of how conflict can be reduced and ended with careful planning and skill. Religion underlies
basic beliefs in other countries as well—the United States, most of Western Europe, even China and Japan -- but it is not normally toxically linked with politics in the same way it is in the Middle East and South Asia. At least for now.

Studies of American presidents and statesmen confirm historically strong religious currents in the US body politic—Woodrow Wilson’s sterness and Presbyterian moralism, the Dulles brothers’ views of about the evil of the Soviet Union are good examples. In the case of presidential level appointees, including intelligence officers, knowledge of religion had not, prior to 9/11 at any rate, been high on anyone’s desired attributes list.

A number of books have studied the development of terrorist worldviews and documented a zeitgeist that is radically far from Western conceptions of political philosophy, but has roots in various other appeals to martyrdom, identification of evildoers, etc.\textsuperscript{12}

R. Scott Appleby, a keen student of sacred politics, underlines the issue succinctly:

The Western myopia on this subject of religious power has been astounding. Christians of the United States, long accustomed to living in a religiously plural society governed by the principles of religious freedom, church-state separation, and the rule of law, seemed to have forgotten the death-
defying roots of their own tradition. Christians, like Muslims, have considered martyrdom a prime opportunity for holiness and, indeed, a direct ticket to heaven.\textsuperscript{13}

Indeed, in the wake of 9/11, law officers in many states were concerned that the rising conservative Christian militias may be developing a tendency to martyrdom. A report on WMD vulnerabilities in Kentucky showed that the principal anxiety of the majority of country sheriffs in the state was focused on potential local, rather than foreign terrorists.\textsuperscript{14}

How belief structures are driven by Religion

Religion really begins to affect intelligence tasking, collection and analysis when we examine intelligence work itself. At the highest levels, an improper understanding of religion and its impact on people undercuts strategic planning. No matter how good agents are, if they cannot get a hearing at the top, or incline political and senior agency leadership to listen and understand, the whole enterprise goes for naught. Milton Scheuer head of the CIA’s Bin Laden Task Force and writing in \textit{Through Our Enemies Eyes} notes several points at which our senior
leadership was unable to comprehend basic truths about Bin Laden because it could not escape the classical modernist paradigm of the decreasing importance of religion.\textsuperscript{15}

Retired CIA covert operative Bob Baer, speaking from the trenches, is even more critical of the need for agents at all levels who can get out and “start listening to people again, no matter how unpleasant the message is.”\textsuperscript{16}

Religion can not be studied by satellite, angels can seldom track down bad guys, and one needs to know how people think, especially those who don’t start from the same place you do.

This problem is not new in history, but it is particularly acute now with the rise of terrorism on a broader scale, and the growth of an ideological perspective in policy/decision makers who have great difficulty in getting beyond their own mindset. The media has been full of sobering examples of this combination over the past eight years: Rigid Neoconservative insistence that people would flock to the American standard of an invasion of Iraq;\textsuperscript{17} major failures in weapons intelligence in Iraq;\textsuperscript{18} and strong indications of intelligence ”cooked” to support certain views.\textsuperscript{19}
This is not new in US history, nor is it a partisan one—from controversy of the Tonkin Gulf incident through the differences over Viet Cong battle estimates during the Vietnam War, and on to the Carter Administration’s handling of Iran, Democrats are as fallible as Republicans.

Several scholars have noted that our misunderstanding of religion’s impact on belief structures derives from a basic failure of the intellectual paradigms for understanding political change. Ofira Seliktar relates this directly to intelligence in her case study of the failure of American intelligence to divine the unwinding of the Iranian Revolution.\(^20\)

In the American case—although separation of church and state has been one of our political myths—religious belief and religion in fact have played key roles in our own national life. Early Americans saw the United States as the "New Jerusalem," the city on the hill where people could work out their destinies freed of the old restraints. Freedom of religion was such a key tenet of our country’s early political doctrine that belief in a divine creator suffused our political life -- and still does despite the increasing 20th century secularization of society.

In fact, there has been a resurgence of the evangelical tradition
in America over the past 50 years. In 1960- there were 2 million more Methodists than Baptists; by 2005, there were more Baptists than Methodists, for example. While the deeper Christian fundamentalists have little to say about foreign affairs, the Evangelicals and the Liberal Protestants are increasingly finding common cause on many issues—the need for increased foreign aid and humanitarian relief, support for Israel, if not Zionism. The evangelical tradition has a strong background in missionary work that give the American churches more punch in interfaith dialog, which can be critical to preventing religious clashes.

Seliktar concludes her study of Khomeini by noting that, “Unfortunately, universal rationality is difficult to square with cultural-religious traditions.” Seliktar concludes her study of Khomeini by noting that, “Unfortunately, universal rationality is difficult to square with cultural-religious traditions.” Seliktar concludes her study of Khomeini by noting that, “Unfortunately, universal rationality is difficult to square with cultural-religious traditions.”

Those who have dealt with Faith-Based Diplomacy note how easily it is for religious leaders to become enmeshed in politics:

“The range of cases make it clear that Christianity and Islam enjoy no monopoly on religious extremism... The rate of killing accelerates, in fact, when the combatants on both sides claim religion as their motivation. The transcendent case ...is a source of renewal for warriors who otherwise might abandon a struggle that becomes protracted, exhausting and ambiguous in its political consequences.
Moreover, it brings an additional leadership dynamic to politics:

“...the religious leader is summoned to the political stage. The reduction of religion to ideology brings with it wrenching demands on the traditional religious figure. ... Under pressure from the roiling forces of sectarian and ethnic conflict, driven by ‘identity crises’ that are fabricated or exaggerated for the purpose of drawing sharp battle lines, the monk (priest, rabbi, imam) becomes a spokesperson for and mobilizer of ordinary believers who can be convinced that the source of their poverty ... lies not in corrupt and despotic regimes...but in the designs and plots of the ethnic or religious “others.”

This scenario has played itself out in the Middle East, South Asia, and the Balkans, and the same dynamic is afloat in Indonesia, the Philippines and potentially in Central Asia. It is especially true in those states which host American forces, which can be made the target “other” by those who can generate enough emotional/religious backing to create unhappy indicents.

Organizational Impact of faith issues
The organizational impact of faith and faith issues has been recognized since the 16th century. What gives it a new spin today is the mix with religious doctrines that go against the modernization paradigm, and bring so-called “irrational” elements into active participation in the political, economic and military arenas. Ultimately, also it is questions of values—which ones drive our societies and how do they integrate with others?

By the start of the 20th century, the major religions were generally in stable relationships with national governments. Governments drew strength and support, religions received assistance, or at the very least, approval for their operations. That soon began to change. Early tensions between the Catholic Church and the Italian and German dictatorships beginning in the 1920’s in Italy and the ‘30’s in Germany led to some interesting cross-currents. In Italy, Mussolini quickly signed a concordat with the Vatican, giving the Catholic Church a favored position, which it maintained until his overthrow in 1943. The Vatican’s relationship with Hitler’s Germany was much more checkered. The Church achieved a modus vivendi in the early years, but was subsequently squeezed out of its important role in civil society as the state closed out various Catholic
organizations—youth groups, professional associations. Catholics who were found to have plotted against the regime were sent to concentration camps, and toward the end of the war, the Nazis were planning a German State Church to supplant both Catholicism and the other Lutheran and evangelical groups.\footnote{24}

Hitler’s relationships with the Vatican deteriorated, even though the Pope had issued an encyclical against the atheistic communists, whom Hitler saw as his enemies. Both the SS and the Gestapo targeted Catholic individuals and groups, and because the values of the Reich were so antithetical to Catholics and the Catholic Church, churchmen often worked subtly and later in active covert efforts against Germany.\footnote{25} This was the age of secular domination of European politics, but the Christian denominations worked to oppose Fascism in many ways, including protection of Jews, anti-Nazi activities in the occupied countries, and supplying intelligence to the Allies.

Churches fared poorly in Russia after the communist takeover in 1918-19, and the Russian Orthodox Church was suborned by the State, especially after Stalin consolidated his power. The KGB targeted religious groups, kept steady watch on them, and made sure that senior clerics were
vetted and approved by the regime. This is still true today.

Beginning in the 1980’s and as a result of American support for the Islamic forces in Afghanistan, the KGB began to fear and target militant Islamic forces in the Soviet Union. This continues today, with special relevance to Chechnya and those Central Asian states where Islamic radicalism has found a foothold, exacerbated to some degree by blowback from the Soviet Afghan invasion and US and allied activities since 2001.

Perhaps the most effective use of religion as a counter-governmental political weapon in the Soviet Bloc was in Poland in the 1980’s. There, the Catholic Church was able to pry the communists out of power by working closely with the Polish Solidarity movement, with help from other countries, including the United States.

Since the 1970’s there have been a number of other instances where religious groups/churches were involved in significant ways in politics. Most denominations in South Africa opposed apartheid in South Africa across its 40+ years of existence. In the rest of Africa, religious organizations have been extensively involved in relief efforts over the past 50 years, and in the Philippines and Germany. The Catholics and the Protestants respectively were
instrumental in the revolutions of 1986 and 1989, which resulted in changes of government.\textsuperscript{28}

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 was different from these cases, as was the post-communist 1992 revolution in Afghanistan that brought the Taliban to power. In both situations, a radical political movement emerged, based on the power of key religious leaders who became politicians. In Iran, the language of the mullahs became the dialog of politics, and the more secular Liberation movement could not withstand both that and Khomeini’s charisma. Even the international language of the present regime is grounded in this hostile dialog—despite the fact that 70\% of the people either ignore or actively reject it.\textsuperscript{29} In 1979, it was almost impossible for US and British diplomats in the field to make our colleagues in Washington and London comprehend the rising Shia fundamentalism in Iran. All sections of both Embassies had great difficulty making critical points to those at home who were not sensitized to what was happening. Sadly, we have only marginally improved in the years since—and the problem is still the paradigm.

In Afghanistan, The Taliban was created by the Pakistani intelligence service, ISI, and was supported by it
until 9/11, and even now. Here again, the Taliban drew on young people who had been trained in the dialog of the religious school, the Maddrassehs. These schools are run by very fundamentalist clergy, who preach and teach a “war of civilization” view that would warm Samuel Huntington’s heart.\textsuperscript{30} The rapid withdrawal of the U.S. from the region after the defeat/withdrawal of the Soviet Union in 1988 left a vacuum in Afghanistan, which was filled by several groups. In the civil war that followed, the Taliban emerged victorious—largely because no one else cared.\textsuperscript{31}

The consequences of this development, coupled with the American strategic decision NOT to root out and destroy the Al Qaeda forces after the Tora Bora battle, when key figures (including Bin Laden) escaped, allowed the Taliban and their radical Muslim allies in the Pakistan to reorganize. Seeing how far the US was distracted, these forces began to reassert themselves in Afghanistan about the time U.S. Chief of Staff Gen. Meyers declared an end to offensive operations in November 2002. It is these forces that the US and NATO are contending with now.

The result of that has been renewed and expanding guerilla activity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which has included seven attempts on Pakistani President Musharref’s
life. It also enabled Al Qaeda to participate in the growing guerilla war against U.S. forces in Iraq, which began to seriously interrupt the rebuilding of that country in the summer/fall of 2003. Allowing the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan to rebuild was one of the worst strategic decisions the Bush administration made, and that particular oversized turkey came home to roost like the mythical Kraken in the spring of 2005.

A principal problem with Al Qaeda is that we have far too little real knowledge of its organization, and have improved that only marginally since 9/11. One US intelligence officer described the loose organization as “franchising terrorism; Bin Laden is the Ray Kroc (MacDonald’s) of Terrorism.” Our present level of actual understanding amounts to hearsay.32

This mis-estimation of organized religious zeal was doubly unfortunate, because it opened up the unnerving prospect of a radical Islamic takeover of Pakistan by forces that will, if they have not already, almost certainly reinsert Muslim guerillas into Kashmir and provoke a confrontation with an India that remains fully mobilized, despite recent
peace overtures. This could far too easily lead to a confrontation in which one or both countries’ nuclear arsenals could be brought into play.\(^{33}\)

While the above shows the most serious current consequence of mis-estimating the organization impact of fundamentalism gone bad, it is not the only place where religious forces ideologically hostile to the West are creating problems – Algeria, Egypt, Sudan and Iraq come quickly to mind.

Iraq is where the most immediate danger lies, as the US tries to get the country organized well enough for the new locally-run government to withstand covert warfare. The US goal is to establish a democratic government, but the crucial issue is what kind, given that the fervent Shia view of democracy would simply leave the largest of Iraq’s three principal groupings with a dominant role. The assumption that Iraq can be made democratic in four months seems naïve, given both the guerilla war and Shiite views on what democracy means. Neither Iraqi progress, nor American thinking nor perseverance have reached the requisite levels for dealing successfully with this situation.

**Special Issues Posed for Intelligence by Religion**
We need to bury once and for all the “modernism” paradigm and abandon the conventional idea that religion necessarily diminishes in importance as societies develop. Instead, accept and use the truth that development sometimes brings social crises (as it has done in the Middle East and elsewhere) that, absent countervailing pressures, brings people back to a version of religion that increases their hostility and gives them emotional and political support.

Until Westerners, from agents and analysts up through White House and departmental staffers to cabinet members and Presidents, learn how Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhists fundamentalists think, they can not properly match their strategies with their actions. A good place to begin is with Holy War. The West does not comprehend the “contemporary phenomenon of Holy War which has become an object of suspicion from both the secular and the Christian perspectives.”

Once one begins to understand Islamic doctrine, one quickly learns that the real conflict created by the Islamic radicals is between themselves and the vast majority of Muslims who do not and cannot accept a badly distorted
theology. It may be humbling for proud American politicians, statesmen and intelligence folk to turn to theology for important political clues, but it is vital, as John Keegan says, “to find a way into the fundamentalist’s mindset and to overcome it from within.”

Along with a better paradigm, there must come the education of a generation of diplomats, politicians, and intelligence officers as well as an increase in general public awareness. Most analysts know that it makes no difference how smart you are, if you can’t communicate successfully with those above you in the hierarchical chain. But this requires that those at the top understand the parameters of what is being presented and discussed. The virtual imperviousness of Bush administration Neoconservatives to those inputs regarding terrorism questions and Middle Eastern capabilities for democracy that challenged their beliefs is now well-known. Again, lest one think this is a just partisan flaw, Robert Baer cites similar blindness during the Clinton administration as well.

If politicians and other senior figures do not understand the consequences of wrong-headedness, they will be taught the hard way, as the US President and the
NeoCons were from 2005-2008. Although US leaders rightly decided to confront bin Laden with military means, their recognition of the motivation and destructive power of the bin Laden phenomenon remains superficial.”38 It is not clear whether American perseverance will remain strong enough to get us through the learning process.

Part of the issue here is hubris and arrogance, much of which has been reflected in the debate of the past few years as to whether America is an “empire” or merely has primacy, and what that means. 39 There has been much criticism of the “war” on terror and its implications in terms of Patriot Acts, military activity, and diplomacy. What are the “right” goals for the United States? How hard should we pursue them and at what cost to other domestic policies? Is the issue as simple as it is posed by Bernard Lewis: “The range of American policy options in the [Middle East] region is reduced to two alternatives, both disagreeable: Get tough or get out,” or is it more subtle and nuanced?

It is in the larger range of choices that uncertainty is greatest, especially for the politician. For the intelligence professional, there are some more easily discernable issues to cope with. Most involve the development of agents,
analysts and managers. The United States has been lucky for a country that didn’t really get into the full-time intelligence business until 1941 (and then almost got out of it for a couple of years after World War II). When World War II came, the American focus in both diplomacy and intelligence was on areas we already knew a great deal about, especially Europe. OSS founder William Donovan could call on friends and contacts from business and government who were familiar with Europe. The U.S. had less luck in the Pacific, where most of our breakthroughs were in the technical areas—code-breaking to win the battle of Midway, etc.40

At the professional level, the choices are more focused. Virtually all critics have called for more human intelligence (HUMINT)—more people in the field who know more about the cultures they are embedded in. Frustrated ex-agent Robert Baer puts it succinctly:

It all comes down to the point that we have to start listening to people again, no matter how unpleasant the message is. The CIA doesn’t have a choice but to once again go out and start talking to people—people who can go where it can’t, see what it can’t, and hear what it can’t.41
That means people who are familiar with the cultures, are familiar with the theological-political arguments of groups, not nations. It also means modifying prohibitions against dealing with “bad people,” that offend many human rights activists. When Willie Sutton was asked why he robbed banks, he replied “Because that’s where the money is.” If you want to understand the world of the terrorist, you have to find a way in. This poses ethical and moral dilemmas, but they will have to be dealt with in one way or another. C.S. Lewis was not the first to caution us about using a very long spoon if we are to sup with the devil.

Similarly, a reassessment of covert action is needed—if, how, and whether it should be used more often, or if current guidelines relaxed for certain types of operations. This discussion will and should be considered in terms of the greater use of open source intelligence, and how better to bring knowledgeable people into the whole policy process. Robert David Steele makes a persuasive case for greater use of the geometrically expanding open source intelligence that is now available. This should include concurrent efforts in the other departments of the national security triad—Foreign Office and Defense—because the biggest issues require a coordinated response that nearly
always goes beyond one department. In sum, the gap between those that know religion and those that know intelligence, diplomacy, and defense needs to be considerably lessened.

How to Proceed?

With intelligence reform once again in the air, it may be worth considering what would need to happen to put the Intelligence Community on track. The kind of change in conceptual thinking is not something that will come easily, and the rest of the foreign affairs and political communities will have to come part way along the track if intelligence officers are to have an understanding audience. Both schools and universities will have to reorient themselves—some of this is already underway—and this paper will not attempt a discussion of that process, except to note that it should be encouraged for a number of reasons, of which intelligence is only one.

On the political side, a refined understanding of how religion interacts with politics should also produce a policy approach to the problem that pulls religious moderates and natural allies along with us. The disastrous slide in U.S.
popularity over the past seven years is ironic for a country that has promoted religious freedom. The “either with us or against us” politics of the immediate post-9/11 period creates the clash of civilizations that Huntington warned about. Without a different tack, stressing the basic harmony between religions on key points (more true to our own values), we will find far fewer allies against the true terrorists than we need in those parts of the world that do not share our own faith.

This would also help us in meeting some of the more narrowly defined needs of the Intelligence Community. Recruiting qualified members of the Muslim faith for intelligence work will be even more difficult than gaining the help of theologians, which will also be necessary for carrying the day against extremist views. As a former intelligence officer put it succinctly, “You can’t send white-bread Americans into these places and expect results.”

For a counter-view that argues no major reform is needed, see Richard K. Betts’ January 2002 argument that intelligence failures are inevitable, and while some minor reforms might help, many proposals would make things worse. Robert Jervis’ recently published work suggests a similar rigidity in intelligence organizations. Some reform,
however, might make them significantly better, especially a changed paradigm on religion which would make organizational reform less critical. Improving our policy knowledge on the religious-cultural issues of the Middle East is a major issue.

This is but one indication of how hard it is to make the simple case for a better understanding of our adversaries when it involves taking new paths and thinking new thoughts. In this instance, a deeper comprehension of some critical fresh issues still seems pressing nine years and counting after 9/11. There is no point to rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic when what we really need to learn is how to melt the icebergs.44

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*Through Our Enemies’ Eyes*, op cit. Chs 1 and 2 focus on Bin Laden. The direct link to terrorism is well traced in Bruce Hoffman’s *Inside Terrorism*, Columbia Univ. Press, 1998, Ch. 4, “Religion and Terrorism.”


*Faith-Based Diplomacy*, op cit., Ch. 4; and Bjorkman, op cit. Ch. 7.

Rashid, Ahmed, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, Yale University Press, 2000, especially chapters 1-3,6 and 8; and Cooley, John K, *Unholy*
Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism, Pluto Press, 2002, documents the growth of radical views among the dispossessed.


14 Source is a member of the team that interviewed officials in all of Kentucky’s 120 counties; the study itself is held very closely.

15 Through Our Enemies Eyes, op. cit., introduction, Chs 1, 4, 14, 15.


19 Seymour M. Hersh, “The Stovepipe: How Conflicts between the Bush Administration and the intelligence community marred the reporting on Iraq’s weapons,” The New Yorker, October 27, 2003, pp. 7-87.

20 Ofira Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, Praeger, 2000, chs 1, 2, and 6.

21 Ibid, p. 23.

22 Faith-Based Diplomacy, op cit., p. 233.

23 Ibid, p. 234.

24 Anthony Holt’s The Vatican in the Age of Dictators (1922-45), Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1973 gives a solid account of these events, especially chapters 13 and 14.


27 The Sword and the Shield, op cit., Ch. 29.

28 Descriptions of these activities can be found in Religion, the Missing Dimension…, op cit.; and Herding Cats, Chester Crocker, et al (eds.), U.S. Institute of Peace, 1999, Chs. 7 and 11.


31 Unholy Wars, op cit., ch. 8; and see the extensive story of U.S. involvement in the 1980’s, Smith”s War.

32 Through our Enemies’ Eyes, op cit., The entire book outlines Ben Laden’s life, Character, motivation and tactics, Chs. 1-5 constitute the short course.


37 See No Evil, op cit., especially chapters 1, 7 and 21.

38 Through Our Enemies’ Eyes op cit, p. 3.

39 Two excellent contrasting views of this can be found in Andrew J. Bacevich, American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy, Harvard University Press, 2002; and Emmanuel Todd, After the Empire: The Breakdown of the American Order, Columbia University Press, 2003. Another solid offering on this subject, just out, is William E. Odom and Robert Dujarric, America’s Inadvertent Empire, Yale Univ. Press, February 2004.

40 Richard J. Aldrich, Intelligence and the War Against Japan: Britain, America and the Politics of Secret Service, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000, especially chs 1 and 4.

41 See No Evil, op cit. p. 271.
