

Angelo Codevilla and William Tecumseh Sherman

Spengler
Asia Times

Angelo Codevilla advises the United States to destroy anti-American regimes throughout the Islamic world by the exercise of external military pressure, and, more importantly, provision of support to the enemies of those regimes, with little regard to the political, territorial, or humanitarian outcome. Under the rubric, "What is to be done?" he writes:

In short, the regimes whose death would give us peace have enemies who are eager to kill them. . . . Democracy may not be part of their agenda, and liberalism surely will not be. That is their business. It is enough for our peace that there be people who have their own reasons for destroying the people and culture—the regimes—that are the effective causes of violence against us. U.S. military operations can and should make it possible for them to do it. (p. 138)

Those who agree with him, including this writer, must ponder our marginalization within the foreign policy and intelligence communities. Codevilla's admonitions over the years, collected in this volume, have had the accuracy of a Cassandra, but also, sadly, the reception of Cassandra as well. The reception of Codevilla's view recalls the opprobrium heaped upon William Tecumseh Sherman, whose career was nearly destroyed in 1861 by his public insistence that victory in the U.S. Civil War required "that the present class of men who rule the South must be killed outright."

Codevilla has no qualms about killing the enemies of the United States, writing:

[T]he dictatorial regimes of the Arab world consist of some 2,000 men, while the Saudi regime is perhaps twice that size. In such places, where regimes exist by brutalizing opponents, changes in regime necessarily involve the bloody settling of bloody scores with those numbers of people. (pp. 135-36)

This statement seems to imply that the demise of perhaps 30,000 enemies of the United States would solve the problem. The question of how many enemies of the United States must perish in order to have peace,

however, is far from trivial. How much death will the West have to inflict upon its enemies before it achieves a lasting peace?

Sherman famously predicted 300,000 southern casualties at the outset of the war. Even after taking Atlanta he insisted, "I fear the world will jump to the wrong conclusion that because I am in Atlanta, the work is done. Far from it. We must kill 300,000 I have told you of so often, and the further they run the harder for us to get them." George F. Will quoted these words in a December 27, 2001 column, in support of his recommendation that "as far as is consistent with the rules of war and the husbanding of the lives of U.S. military personnel, U.S. strategy should maximize fatalities among the enemy, rather than expedite the quickest possible cessation of hostilities."¹

Sherman's forecast of 300,000 enemy casualties came uncannily close to the final tally of 258,000. That is, three percent of the South's nine million people died in uniform. For the sake of argument, suppose that George F. Will's analogy applies in a literal sense, and that three percent of the current population of the Arab world plus Iran would become casualties before peace could be achieved. Given their combined population about of 360 million, that would be ten million casualties.

It is just as reasonable to assume that the number of deaths required for victory in the War on Terror would reach ten million as it is to assume 30,000. Compared to the civilizational wars of the twentieth century, ten million deaths does not represent a large number; communism alone killed 100 million. Between one and two million people died in the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. A combination of civil wars and regional wars in the Persian Gulf well might produce a casualty total comparable to that of the U.S. Civil War.

Codevilla compares the twenty-first century to the fifth century B.C., that is, to the Peloponnesian War of 431-404 B.C.:

To move successfully, one must understand the state of rest to which one must come. To tailor operations for a victory worthy of the name, one must understand the peace that victory is to produce, and what stands in its way. This is as true in the twenty-first century A.D. as it was in the fifth century B.C. (pp. xii-xiii)

The analogy, though, raises a related question, namely, how rapidly peace might be achieved. The Athens-Sparta war shows that even at an elevated rate of killing, some conflicts cannot be resolved quickly. It is interesting that several of the most important historical conflicts lasted for thirty years, for example, the Peloponnesian War of 431-404 B.C., the Thirty

¹ George F. Will, "Gen. Sherman's Advice," available online at <http://www.jewishworldreview.com/cols/will122701.asp>.

Years War of 1618-1648, and Europe's Great War of 1914-1945. To fight this sort of war to its conclusion, the victorious side first must kill the fathers, and then kill their sons once they come of military age. Why did Athens launch the disastrous expedition against Sicily in the seventeenth year of the Peloponnesian War? Thucydides remarks that "It was all the easier to provide everything as the city had just recovered from the plague and the years of continuous war, and as a number of the young men had grown to manhood." Gunnar Heinsohn observed in a recent essay for *Die Zeit* that the Germany of 1914 had 160 newborn sons for every 10,000 inhabitants, four times as many as today. The baby boom of the years preceding World War I produced a new generation of German soldiers for World War II.²

What sort of wars are these that first kill the fathers, and then the sons? They are the contention of one people against another people for interests so vital that the young men of a people will die rather than concede them. Christians and pagans both have fought such wars. Why should not Muslims? We might call such wars "existential" rather than "civilizational," for some of the most terrible of them have been fought within a single civilization rather than between civilizations. Athens and Sparta were prepared to fight to exhaustion for their respective empires. The seventeenth-century Austrian Empire had no qualms about fighting to preserve the principle of Catholic Empire until nearly half of German-speaking Europe had perished, a decision made easier by the French policy of keeping the war going so as to weaken Germany.

Muslim terrorists already have, or soon will hold, the dubious record of committing the largest number of suicides in history in pursuit of a military goal. Although suicide bombers may represent the extreme tail of the distribution of Muslim opinion, the bunching of data points at the distribution's tail should tell us something about the character of the distribution as a whole. No other population in history has harbored sufficient hatred and fanaticism to persuade so many of its young people to take so extreme an action. That is, the extreme anti-Americanism of Arab regimes to which Codevilla refers must reflect extensive support for extremism among their populations.

It is hard to gauge opinion in unfree societies. To the extent that Arab (or Persian voters) have had the opportunity to express their views at the polls during the past year, however, they have tended to support Islamic extremists such as Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hamas in the West Bank of the Jordan, Hizbollah in Lebanon, the Shia religious parties in Iraq, and perhaps most importantly, Mahmud Ahmedinejad in Iran against more pragmatic opponents. Although Iran's presidential election of June 2005 was anything

² Gunnar Heinsohn, "Finis Germaniae?" available online at http://www.zeit.de/feuilleton/kursbuch_162/1_heinsohn.

but fair, the overwhelming support for Ahmedinejad in rural and poorer urban districts cannot be dismissed as mere poll-rigging.

Everything that we observe in the Arab-Iranian sphere suggests that future conflicts are likely to be prolonged and embittered. Not only does a large part of the population subscribe to extreme positions, but also a higher percentage of the population than any other population in history is prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice in furtherance of these positions. How much damage must the extremists suffer, and how long will it take to inflict such damage, in order to reach a “state of rest”? In order to answer these two questions, we first must inquire as to the sources of the extremism.

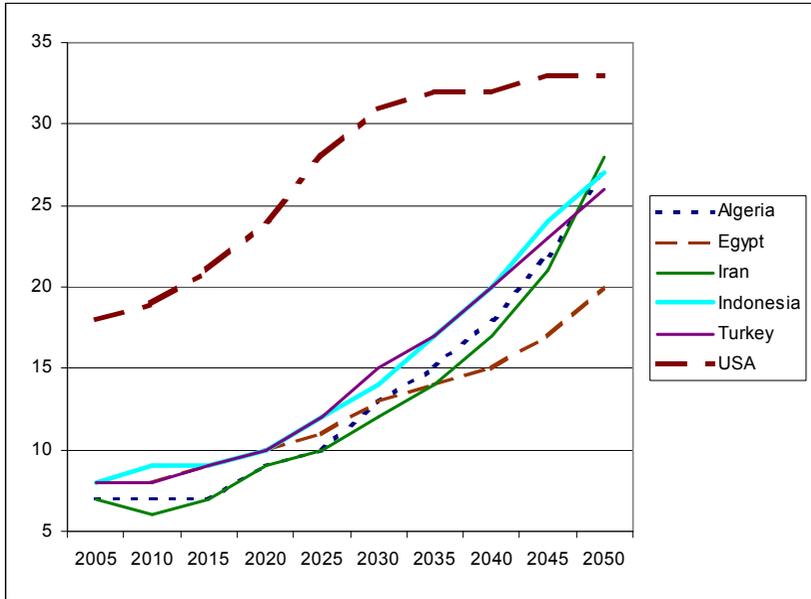
There are two dimensions to Iranian extremism: one is demographic, and the other is ideological. I will examine these in turn before offering a tentative answer to my own questions.

We first need to understand the demographic crisis in the Muslim world. Extremists come to the fore when the ambient population finds itself under extreme duress. A great deal has been written about the Iranian president’s penchant for apocalyptic mysticism, but very little about the conditions which make an apocalyptic outlook appeal to a wider population. Within a generation Iran will encounter demographic and economic conditions that threaten social breakdown, I believe, and it is in anticipation of a coming crisis that the Iranian population has chosen an extremist leader.

Aging populations will cause severe discomfort in the United States and extreme pain in Japan and Europe by mid-twenty-first-century. But the same trends will devastate the frail economies of the Islamic world, and likely plunge many countries into social chaos. By 2050, elderly dependents will comprise nearly a third of the population of some Muslim nations, notably Iran’s, converging on America’s dependency ratio at mid-century. But it is one thing to face such a problem with America’s per capita GDP of \$40,000, and quite another to face it with Iran’s per capita GDP of \$7,000—especially given that Iran will stop exporting oil before the population crisis hits. The industrial nations face the prospective failure of their pension systems. But what will happen to countries that have no pension system, where traditional society assumes the care of the aged and infirm? In these cases it is traditional society that will break down, horribly and irretrievably so.

Iranian President Ahmedinejad has taken pre-emptive action in the face of the impending crisis to the inevitable depopulation of rural Iran. In a program made public August 15, 2005, Ahmedinejad revealed a response worthy of Hitler or Stalin to the inevitable unraveling of Iran’s traditional society. He proposes to reduce the number of villages from 66,000 to only 10,000, relocating 30 million Iranians.

Exhibit 1: Elderly Dependent Ratio, Selected Muslim Countries vs. USA

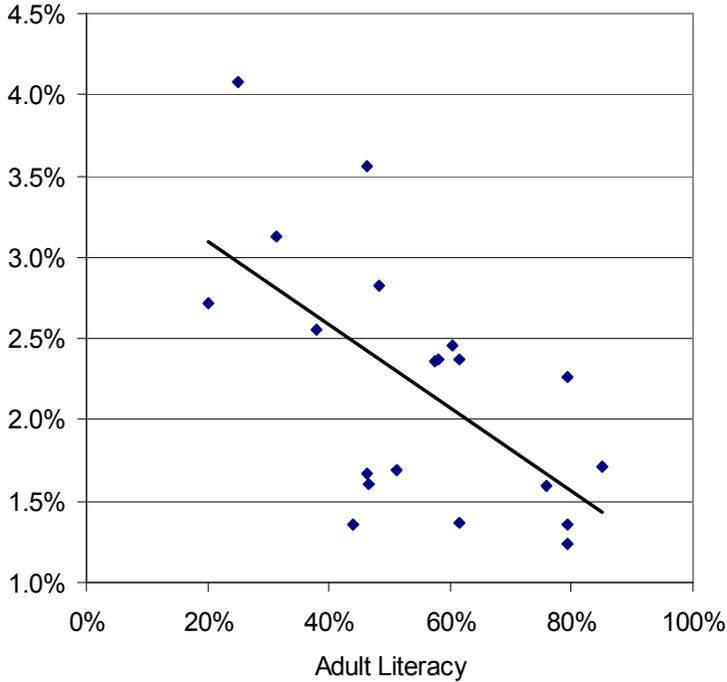


Source: United Nations

What is killing the fertility rate in the Muslim world? There really is no such thing as a “Muslim” fertility rate, but rather a wide spectrum of fertility rates that express different degrees of modernization. Where traditional conditions prevail, characterized by high rates of illiteracy (and especially female illiteracy), the fertility rate remains at the top of the world’s rankings. But where the modern world encroaches, fertility rates are plummeting down to levels comparable to the industrial world. No single measure of modernization captures this transformation, but the literacy rate alone explains most of the difference in fertility rates among Muslim countries. Among the 34 largest Arab countries, just one factor, namely, the difference in literacy rates, explains sixty percent of the different in the population growth rate in 2005.

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Exhibit 2: 2050 Literacy Rate vs. Population Growth Rate among 34 Largest Arab Countries



Source: United Nations

The population of Somalia, where only a quarter of adults can read, is growing at an enormous four percent per year. At that rate, the number of Somalis will double in just eighteen years. But in Algeria, where sixty-two percent of adults can read, the population growth rate is only 1.4 percent per year. At that rate it would take fifty years for the population to double. Qatar, with a literacy rate close to eighty percent, has a population growth rate of just 1.2 percent. The modern crisis of faith that eroded traditional society in the West over centuries is hitting the Islamic world within the compressed time frame of a single generation.

The second dimension of extremism has to do with the religious propensity for self-sacrifice. Modern Islamism as a movement began as a response to this crisis of faith, and Islamist leaders like Ahmedinejad are energized by a profound sense of the fragility of Islam in the modern world.

With the ascendance of the Shia current in Islam under these conditions, Shia leaders incline as a matter of history and ideology to an apocalyptic stance.

All religion in some sense is about blood, because all religion is about life. Shia Islam, though, displays an affinity for real blood that disturbs the West. On their holiest day, the Feast of Ashura, Shia cut themselves until they bathe in their own blood. Spurting blood is the preferred symbol of Iran's Islamic revolution. Fountains shooting red dye at Tehran's Behesht-e-Zahra cemetery recalled the blood of the young Iranians interred there, who fell in the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's suicide battalions during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. This turns Western stomachs, despite the universal presence of blood symbols in Western religion, as we observe in the Eucharist as well as the blood sacrifices of the Hebrew Bible. Catholics drink Christ's blood literally (according to the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation) and Protestants symbolically in order to attain eternal life, while lambs' blood kept the Angel of Death from the doors of the ancient Hebrews on the eve of their exodus.

One dies a vicarious death in order to secure eternal life. Unlike Christians or Jews, whose religions are based on vicarious sacrifice, Islam demands the self-sacrifice of its adherents, in keeping with its essentially militant character. Revealed religion puts blood at a distance; Abraham sacrifices a ram and spares his son Isaac, and God sacrifices his own son in order to spare humankind. Unlike Christianity or Judaism, Islam has no ritual of sacrifice, only ancillary sacrificial customs. Nor does it need one, for as Muslim authorities teach, the sacrifice that Islam demands is that of the Muslim himself. That is the secret of Ashura.

Unlike Christians, Muslims require no ritual of rebirth, for in their doctrine they already are the descendants of Abraham, through the supposed true line of Ishmael, the favored son of the patriarch whose heritage was usurped by the crafty descendants of Isaac—the Jews and their emulators the Christians. Allah sent prophets to all the nations of the world, but the Jews falsified the message of the prophets so as to favor their ancestors at the expense of the true successor of Abraham. In the revolt against the usurpers, all the tribes of the world enjoy the equality of the horde.

Revolt against usurpation, the revenge of the pure life of traditional society against the corrupt mores of the metropole, is the heart of Islam. The Muslim rejects the supposed chosen people of God as usurpers, and defends traditional society against the crucible of peoples that is the Christians' New Israel. But Islam also forms a new people, the *umma*, the collective of Muslims to which the individual must submit. In the pagan world the young men of each tribe march out to fight their enemies, and delay the inevitable moment when their tribe will be overwhelmed and its memory extinguished. Islam summons the tribes to unite against the oppressive empires to its west, to march out together and fight until its enemy, the *Dar-al-Harb*, exists no

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more.

Islam has no ethnicity; it is not an Arab movement; it is a new people, but a people defined first of all by militancy. The individual Muslim does not submit to traditional society as such, no matter how many elements of traditional society might be incorporated into Muslim doctrine; he submits to the movement of the tribes. That is why *jihad* is the most authentic form of Muslim religious activity, and why the blood rituals of Ashura the most authentic form of Muslim worship.

Shia are predisposed to self-sacrifice by belief and ritual, and sense that their backs are to the wall as traditional society erodes in the face of globalization. Under these circumstances, it seems probable that Shia militancy against the West will be prolonged and bloody. It is not merely regimes composed of a few thousand people, but armies composed of millions that may fight to the death. The West is no more prepared psychologically for the scale of carnage that may ensue than the United States was prepared for the severity of its civil war. Perhaps that is a good thing, for men well might lay down their burden, knowing how difficult is the road ahead. Nonetheless, somewhere, and at some time, the terrible discussion of the cost of establishing a Clausewitzian peace must take place.