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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
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## **POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ISLAM IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

A lecture delivered  
at the Naval War College  
10 November 1959 by  
*Professor J. S. Badeau*

We are considering a very nebulous topic this morning. Before coming here, I was reminded of the experience of an old colleague in Cairo during the war. When the British troops needed to be entertained, someone got the bright idea that a lecture on the "Religion of Islam" would be a good topic, since religion is such an important element in Eastern life. My friend, an elderly and venerable missionary, was invited to Alexandria to talk on the subject to the British tommies. The meeting was in charge of a top sergeant, who stood behind the table and introduced the lecturer by saying, "Boys, here's another one of those bloody Yanks come to gas at you."

It may seem to you that talking about something as vague as the intellectual formulation of a religion is being "gassed at." Yet the fact is that Islam is one of the profoundest and most continuing influences of Middle Eastern life. While its operation is difficult to specify, and illusive in its character, anyone who lives in the area constantly feels the effect of its influence. We are to determine this morning, as far as one can in a single lecture, something of the character and place of this spiritual influence in the social and political life of the Middle East.

Islam is often considered one of the chief causes for the turbulence of the Middle East. It is accused of being a principal source of anti-Westernism. It is sometimes argued that, since its very beginning, the Moslem world has been in conflict with the Christian world — that the Crusades have never been quite forgotten — that the European domination of the 19th and 20th centuries was domination in the hands of Christian nations. Therefore, by virtue of being Islamic, the Middle East is naturally and permanently hostile to the Christian and to the political world of

the West. It is also argued that Islam will probably be the determining factor in the success or failure of Communism in the Middle East. With a religion that is firmly and deeply rooted in its sense of God, it is argued that godless Marxism can never flourish among the common masses of the Middle East. Thus, both the dislike of the Middle East for the Western world and its probable dislike for Communism in the future have been explained by this Islamic factor.

Yet this is an oversimplified and very false view of the situation. Until the period at the end of the Second World War, the Middle East was rather enthusiastically pro-Western. When I went to live in the area in 1928, every place that I went — even those places that were in political conflict with France and Great Britain — was basically pro-Western. The name of America was untarnished and was looked to as the epitome of all wisdom. The change that has come about in the Middle East's attitude toward the Western world since the Second World War has not been a change that can be specified in religious terms. It is not because the Middle East has become more Moslem that it has become more anti-Western.

Indeed, if you turn to the movements which most are in conflict with the Western world (like the movement of Nasser) you find that whatever else they throw in our faces, it is never the fact that we are *Christians* and they are *Moslems*. It cannot be said that the anti-Westernism of the Middle East stems from Islam in this simple form.

Nor can it be said that Islam is the great inhibitor of Communism. As you well know, there is no other area of the uncommitted world which has been penetrated so rapidly and deeply by the Soviet Union as the Middle East. The argument that religious faith as such is an inhibitor of Communism simply fails in the face of current facts.

Yet to conclude that Islam has no role in the Middle East — that it is not an operational factor in Middle East political or social attitudes, is equally false. The field of religious loyalties is

extremely hard to define. Who shall say what are the dimensions in which American patriotism affects the actions of the United States government? How much of our attitude toward foreign nations is based upon economic motives, and how much is based upon patriotic motives? It is almost impossible exactly to define such a situation and similarly it is almost impossible to define the situation in which a great religious heritage and loyalty like Islam operates.

Nevertheless, religion is a constant element, and in some sense the reaction of the Middle East has had, and will continue to have, elements that can be labeled *Islamic*. It is something like the mosques of this area with which I have always been so fascinated. Their style of building changes from generation to generation, the elements which they incorporate — the pointed arches of Armenia, the heavy domes from central Asia — all are imported. Some are built in stone, some are built in brick and now many are being built of reinforced concrete. But however much the materials differ, they carry on them the stamp of Islamic origin. So it seems to me that however much the materials with which the modern Middle East is dealing are altered, they will always have a certain Islamic stamp. It is an attempt to determine what that stamp may be that is the substance of our concern this morning.

Let me direct our concern principally to the factors which I think will give us at least the framework for understanding the situation. The first is to inquire briefly, "What is the nature of Islam as a force operating in current society and in politics?" The second is to consider how Islam is related to the facts of Communist penetration. In these two topics we can take the principal measure of our problem.

In order to understand Islam as an operating force in politics and society we must take into account what it was originally, what it developed into as a great heritage, and what are the factors which today alter that heritage and recast Islam into its modern form.

Let me speak briefly about the character of original Islam. I don't want "to gas at you" about theology, but I think that the

Western world, especially the American world, tends to approach the religious convictions of other people far too much in terms of our own experience. First, religion is something that a man believes about God and about individual moral action. We have become so thoroughly secularized and have learned how to live with people who differ so profoundly from our own personal religious views, that religion has become a very personal concept for us. This is entirely foreign to the whole flow of religion in the Middle East, and especially it is foreign to the original concept of Islam. Islam, when it came into being, was a *total way of life*. It held in its purview all human activities. It did not divide human experience into economics, family life, social life, political life, and religious life. It drew them all together under the cloak of religion. When you talk about Islam, you talk about something that is all-embracing in its claim on human loyalty and in its penetration into the human actions. It developed a theology, a political structure and a theory of the state, a system of law to regulate not only ritual acts, but economic and judicial acts. It gave rise to great social institutions in the family and in education, and in the realm of social action. And it became the cell wall and bearer of a culture — the culture that we call Islamic.

In this totality of Islam — this concept of a religion being the entire and most basic loyalty of life — many elements came in from outside. Roman law entered into the development of this system, customs of the Byzantine and Persian states shaped government, the richness of classical Greek and Roman thought were absorbed. All were drawn from the outside into this developing cell of a new religious life and presently became integral to it, so that as Islam passed on through the Middle Ages and blossomed into a great political and cultural system, it contained within its life-blood diverse elements — but they were all stamped with the Islamic seal.

Thus, the structure of Islam that you find embodied in the books, and referred to with wistful longing today, was a *theoretical* structure which never actually became operative. The actual conditions of society were always outrunning the theory, and while the

Moslem savants and the theologians said, "This is Islam," the practical ruler of government was deflected from his loyalty to the ideal system by the practical necessities of the case. Islam called, for instance, for opening its doors to all who wished to embrace it, but very early the Arab rulers of the Omayyad empire discovered that if too many Christians became Moslems too quickly, the government treasury would be in trouble, for a non-Moslem could not serve in the armed forces, and so he paid a tax in order to get out of military service. For periods of time the Moslem rulers to the Arab empire discouraged the conversion of non-Moslems in the interest of the treasury — even then the cash was sometimes more basic than religious conviction in life.

The clearest case of this lack of theoretical structure being actually embodied in social and political life came during the great days of the Turkish Empire. There Turkish tribal customs, the Byzantine governmental system which was taken over in conquest, and the demands of a large and heterogeneous empire, combined to produce a certain kind of society and state. While that society and state operated behind the facade of religion, it was not purely religious. Historians of this period say that there was a "religious institution" and a "ruling institution," and at any given moment the actual circumstances of life and politics were a tension between these two forces.

This is simply background to illustrate the fact that what we call *Islam* has never been a single and unchangeable entity. Islam has always changed its role and character. Practical operational Islam in society has always been a compromise between the theory of religion and the necessities of rule. There is no single, normative period; you cannot say "at this point" the modern world has departed from what it ought to be as a Moslem world. It has always been departing, just as Christian civilization has always departed from its theories. What one has to do is not to discuss the point of departure, but to discuss the particular tension in which the Moslem elements stand today in relation to the factors which operate in the modern world. Medieval Islam with its medieval Islamic system was a compromise between basic Moslem con-



victions, in the fields I have mentioned, and the intrusion of classical thought, of eastern statecraft and of certain political factors. Modern Islam is a compromise between the historic Moslem convictions and forces like nationalism and secularism and science. If the role of Islam today differs from the role of Islam in the great medieval period, it is not because the modern Moslems are heretics, but because they live in a different kind of world, and therefore they must find a different kind of solution.

We need to remember too, before we discuss Islam in the modern world, that Islam varies sharply from country to country. Because the diplomats have labeled a certain area under the eastern end of the Mediterranean the "Middle East" we tend to give it a homogeneous character, which, of course, it does not have. The role of Islam in Turkey and the role of Islam in Yemen are separated by almost 400 years. Both are Islamic, profoundly Islamic, but are so different from each other that save for the similarity of names one would never classify them in the same world. We must recognize that Islam is not only a constant tension from century to century, but changes from country to country.

With this background let us examine Islam in relation to the modern forces that underlie the political and social restlessness of the Middle East. I said the first force which accounts for the tensions out of which the modern role of Islam rises is the force of *nationalism*. Nationalism is a concept that is basically anti-Islamic. When Mohammed came into the society of seventh century Arabia, he found what was the equivalent of nationalism. It was not attachment to a country; it was attachment (as has always been true in nomadic societies) to a tribe. Man found his place in society because of his tribal heritage.

Against this concept that a man's place in the world is determined by family and tribal status, Mohammed took an uncompromising stand. He said in the Koran, "Verily, those of you most worthy of honor," — and the word "honor" in this case you might translate as being "blue-blooded" — "are the most pious of you," — not those who have tribal ancestors or belong to one of the great

tribal confederations. This doesn't count any more, it is *religion* that gives man a place in society.

When I went to the Middle East in 1928 if you stopped a man in Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, or Baghdad, and said, "What are you?" the first answer you would get is, "I am a Moslem," or Christian or Jew; then (as an afterthought) he might add, "I live in Beirut," or Cairo, or Baghdad. Almost never would a man say, "I am an Egyptian," or a Lebanese, or an Iraqi, or a Palestinian. Even then this old Islamic concept of a man's place in the world being set by his religious community was paramount.

So the idea of nationalism — that a man's destiny is controlled by the geographic borders within which he was born — is basically in conflict with the historic Moslem conviction that it is a community of faith, not a community of geography that determines man's place in the world. This being true, it is interesting to ask why it is that the Moslem has so eagerly and rapidly embraced nationalism. The answer is found in two factors: the first is that not even Islam can stamp out the inherent sense of cultural and geographical togetherness. When Islam began to absorb great and ancient cultures like the Persian culture on one side and the Egyptian-Byzantine culture on the other, for a few centuries it overlaid them with its religious equalitarianism. But when there were separatist political movements, bred out of distaste for the Arab conqueror, a part of their repercussion was the revival of a sense of the ancient past. Especially in Iran and later in Turkey there grew up what was actually a form of nationalism, that is, a sense of racial and geographical destiny apart from the status of being a Moslem. So the basic force of nationalism was already in the Middle East.

More important, nationalism was welcomed by Moslem countries because they believed it would be an instrument for solving the problem of their political degradation. You cannot understand most of the Moslem world today in its reactions to outside forces without remembering that, like Rip Van Winkle, it went to sleep in the prime of life. At the end of the 16th century, when its

reputation in world affairs was still high, when it had a great culture of its own, when it was important and influential in the matters of the world, it passed off the world scene. When it reawakened in the 19th century, it found a new world. The culture of which it was so proud was looked down upon by Westerners; political power had passed from the Middle East into the hands of Europe. Suddenly the Moslem world found itself a captive world, a colonialized world, a world in the grip of outside forces. Ever since about the beginning of the 19th century, there has been running through almost all Moslem countries a current of resentment against political degradation and a desire to discover some method by which the Moslem community could rehabilitate itself in the modern world. Nationalism seems to offer that method; it was the force by which modern Europe was created. The awakening political consciousness of the Moslem world saw a separate national state, a force that could revive the political importance of Moslem countries. National leaders said, "We must first create individual Moslem countries and make them strong, and throw off the Western yoke, and then we will combine and go back to the original Moslem concept." From about 1840, the political movements of the Moslem world were very seldom in the direction of the revival of a Moslem political concept of a world community, and almost all in the direction of the evolving of separate national states, in the hope that these would be the atoms for a new and revived Islamic world.

But the difficulty is that at the heart of nationalism (as I have already suggested) are elements which are basically anti-Islamic. Not only does it profess to organize human life on a secular basis (that is a basis unrelated to religious convictions), but the form of nationalism in the modern world, with its pattern of Western parliamentary procedures, is at variance with the political structure of medieval Islam. In the medieval Islamic world the ruler of the state was an executive and the head of the judiciary, but he was not the law-maker — at least in theory. The divine law had been given by God through the Koran and elaborated by the medieval jurists into a system of canon law (Sharia). The ruler of a Moslem country was responsible for applying this law to his

state. Even when he had to enact laws not included in the Sharia, the jurists could pass on the validity of the enactment by reference to the standards of canon law.

The great change that nationalism has brought is the concept that the laws of a nation are not given by God, but are determined in some sense by the government, and at least in theory by the popular vote. And this strikes at the very basis of the Moslem political conception — the conception of a divinely ordered community governed by a law written in heaven and revealed on earth to men. Now, instead of God making the laws, you have Parliaments and Councils making them. Thus nationalism has struck at a fundamental Islamic concept. No matter how much a modern state may claim to be Islamic (as the “Islamic Republic of Pakistan”), in fact the operational forces of state and government and political life are no longer principally Moslem.

Naturally, as the national state has risen into prominence Middle East governments often use religious feeling as a political force. A good example of this is the U.A.R. I find very little evidence that in Nasser’s foreign policies his Islamic convictions play any significant role. They may form the fundamental ideas of his mind, but they do not play an open and significant role. If you study the propaganda that goes out over the Voice of the Arabs beamed to Africa and the Middle East, you will find that by and large, the Islamic element is very small indeed. There is no evidence, for instance, that Egypt treats a Moslem neighbor differently than it treats a non-Moslem neighbor. When Nasser and Jordan get into a fight he talks about Jordan just as he would talk about the United States — there’s no difference at all. Yet when you turn to the eternal policies of Egypt you find that in relation to the common people, the government is very sensitive to the Islamic factor. Before it moved on land reform, it got clearance from the religious sheiks. When it discovered that the new head of Al-Azhar questioned the legitimacy of birth control, it did not stop its birth control movement, but it quietly played it down until he could be made to see the error of his ways.

Had we time to study each Moslem country of the Middle East, we would find that although nationalism has supplanted Islam as an overall operative political philosophy, it has tended to revive the religious connection between the common masses of people and the government, because it is now somewhat upon the reaction of the common masses that the government stability is determined. On one hand nationalism has attacked the idea of Islam as a truly operative political form, internally (at least for short periods) it has often revived a concern for Moslem religious values.

A second force that determines the role of Islam in the modern Middle East today is the relation between this past and changing patterns of society. The society of the Middle East (by which I mean the form of the community — the way in which land is owned, the relation between land owners and those who live on their land, the classes and their economic activities) is marked from its past by a strong Islamic stamp. Not, as I have already suggested, because the actual social arrangements of the past are due solely to influences that came out of Islam itself. Islam has been a catchall, just as Christianity was; we know that a large part of so-called "Christian civilization" of the Middle Ages was the heritage of Germanic tribal practices and pagan Rome. But it was baptized into the Christian faith and took the stamp *Christian*. So the totality of practices that we identify with the Middle East — polygamy, the seclusion of women, the prohibition of taking interest on money, and many other aspects of society—originated outside Moslem faith, but were "baptized" into Islam and made up the totality of the Islamic society.

The most significant thing about the Middle East is that today it is increasingly in revolt against this kind of society. The demand for political independence is almost always the first step. We make a great mistake in assuming in the Middle East that economic motivation is more basic than political motivation. Twice this assumption has been made, and twice it has led to disaster. Once when the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company said that the Persians would never cut off their economic nose to spite their face — but

they did! And once by the argument that the Arabs would acquiesce in a Jewish state because they would benefit by it economically.

At the beginning it is this national political rebirth that stirs the Middle East, but the second step always is that political resentment tends to pass into a social resentment. Today it is in this stage of revolt against society that a large part of the Middle East finds itself. But this is not simply a revolt against separate aspects of society — that this or that is wrong. Increasingly it is the conviction of those who are socially conscious in the Middle East that the *whole system* is wrong — that the Middle East cannot be modern and enter the modern world unless it recasts the whole basis of its social life. It is this growing total revolt against the patterns of past social and economic relationships that is at least as important as political resentments in the turbulence of the modern Middle East.

At this point the Moslem heritage faces two serious problems. The first is that there has been no leadership in the Moslem world that has been able to rework its own social concepts and to restate them for the modern world. We have not been too successful with that in the West, and yet there has been a good deal of activity in the Christian and Jewish camps in trying to discover in the origins of Christian and Jewish faiths, social ideals that are pertinent to the modern day. In a thinker like Reinhold Niebuhr you have an example of those who are at least trying to disentangle our social ideas from their past religious connotations and give them a fresh religious connotation in the meaning of today.

But Islam has been singularly ineffective in doing this. There has been a significant intellectual criticism of the Moslem world by Moslems. Most of it has been confined rather sharply to the political sphere, and most of it has been almost entirely negative. If you were to look today for any profound study of what there is in this great 13th-century old social system that would help create a better society today, you will find a great void. This is something that has interested me, because I do not believe that you can revive the rural village economy of the Middle East without taking

account of religion. I am continuously on the defensive when I talk with ministers of education or social affairs or public health in the Middle East countries where my organization is working, because I'm in the position of defending Islam and saying, "Why don't you think about using Islamic forces?" And they look at me first with amazement, and second with pity that I can be so naive.

There is a mosque in every village. This mosque is a center of traditional life. It could be made a center of rural improvement, I argue. Here is the only educated man of the community — the priest (if you would call him such, although he does not have the sacerdotal character). Suppose you made him a literacy expert, and taught him something about modern sanitation, and he could use his religious position to further social ideas. What you could do in a village! But nobody thinks of this, because there has been no vigorous attempt to discover out of the Moslem past strong social institutions and influences that can be reshaped in the modern day.

The other reason why Islam has failed is because since it has been the cell wall of society, it has to bear the onus of all the failure of the past. The land-owning system of the Middle East was not created by Islam, but it was blessed by Islam. The inferior status of woman in the Middle East was not entirely created by Islam; it was very largely an import from Iran and India, but Islam blessed it. Thus Islam has become identified with the "ancient regime," and when there is revolutionary talk about the necessity of a total change, inevitably this involves a repudiation of the Islamic social concept. So today the Moslem world is much more radical in its social reconstruction than it is in its theological reconstruction. People still use the facade of inherited religious phrases, but when you get down to the Nassers, and the Kassems, who are dreaming of a new, modern, vigorous society, you find they are not using the Islamic phrases or thinking in Islamic terms. Islam in their minds is often a social barrier to be overcome, not a force to be used.

I remember the first Minister of Social Affairs in Egypt, who came over to the American University of Cairo, when I was

in that institution, to discuss his program of social change (this was before the war). He laid out a very drastic plan, including the limitation of polygamy and the restriction of divorce before the court. Someone said, "Mr. Minister, suppose the Moslem teachers do not accept this, then what?" He said, "Well, we will work these social changes with Islam, if possible, but, if necessary, without Islam." While this is rarely said in public today, I think it is the basic attitude toward much social change. To put it differently, the acids of modernity have eaten so deeply into the basic social fabric that there is very little left from the past that is being utilized in the formation of a society.

In the third place, Islam stands not only in tension with nationalism and with the desire to create a new society, it also stands in tension with the modern intellectual materials of thought. In the medieval period, Islam was the reservoir of human thought and knowledge. Its theologians and savants worked out careful formulations of the scientific and philosophic problems of their day. Some of this is still alive. I remember in 1929 being outside of Baghdad, and anxious to try out my faulty Arabic I sat down in a coffee shop and looked around for a likely companion. I found one in the local mullah of the mosque. We started to talk with each other and he asked me if I had ever studied philosophy. I said, "Yes," and he said, "Well, if you studied philosophy you can immediately answer this question: Is your eye hot or cold?" I started to put my hand up to feel it and he said, "No, no, if you feel your eye, you are not a philosopher, you have to answer this on the basis of philosophical knowledge." I said, "What do you mean?" "Oh," he said, "you have never studied philosophy! Everybody knows that the sun is the eye of the universe just as your eye is the sun of the body, and if the eye of the universe is hot, then the eye of the body must be hot, too."

This is the old Greek theory of the macrocosm and the microcosm, flourishing in the twentieth century within the bounds of Islamic learning.

Now as you readily recognize, the flood of modern knowledge which has rushed into the Moslem mind is entirely outside of



this tradition. The intellectual materials with which the modern world deals are no longer intellectual materials that carry the Moslem stamp upon them. There are in the Moslem past some very great intellectual values that, recast into the modern day, have still a great role to play in forming and directing the human mind. But few scholars are attempting this, and therefore the Moslem intellectual pattern of the past is chiefly an antiquarian interest, and if you pass today into the new educational systems of the university, or of the secondary and primary school level, you will find they have shed their Islamic character. Islam is no longer the center of their intellectual life or the reservoir of their intellectual materials; they have capitulated to the modern world and to modern science.

Finally and briefly, let me say something about Islam as a personal morality in the modern world. Here one has to distinguish sharply between the great masses of common people who are still basically religious and the intellectual elite. Certainly among the masses Islamic appeals are strong and Islam is operative, but when you pass into the intelligentsia (and I mean by the intelligentsia the literate class which is perhaps 10%-15% of the population), you will find that it is very seldom a profound and clear-cut Moslem conviction that lies at the basis of human action. I think the clearest illustration of this came from two books which were written in Cairo during the early part of the 1950s, both by theological professors (and this gives them point). The first was a vitriolic attack upon traditional Islam as a political and social system under the title *We Start From Here*. The argument was that this kind of traditional religious life did suit the modern day. Not too many months after it, one of the author's colleagues wrote a book answering him, called *The Beginning of Wisdom*, which was an impassioned defense of the traditional Islamic pattern of politics and society. The interesting thing about both of these books was that neither of them argued about the *truth* of religion. They both accepted it as the final determiner of values of the *welfare of society*. The man who attacked Islam, attacked it because he said it did not help society, and the man who defended Islam, defended it because

he said it did help society. Whether religion was true or false was not their concern, for in fact they had divested themselves of their religious loyalty and accepted a social loyalty as the ultimate determiner of values. When you cease to argue about the *truth* of religion and only talk about the *usefulness* of religion you have ceased being religious! Unconsciously both of these people had repudiated religion as an ultimate way to truth and had made it instrumental to something else.

This is what has happened in the minds of the intelligentsia — confused and not entirely clear about what they are doing, their religious loyalty has been penetrated by other loyalties. No matter what they say or how they phrase it into traditional language, religion is no longer for this leadership group the sole spring of their moral life.

One has to conclude that in the modern political and social scene today, Islam is rapidly losing its traditional force. It is being cast into some new form, the pattern of which is not yet clear. Faced with nationalism and secularism and modern intellectual values, Islam is trying to define for itself a new role. I think we are all too easily misled by the confusion of the moment into the assumption that this new role will not have Islamic elements in it. What they are nobody can predict, but that they will have an Islamic stamp seems to me clear.

Now let me say something about the relation of Islam to the current Communist challenge in the Middle East. There is no doubt that Islam and Communism are theoretically in violent conflict. I could collect any number of statements by Moslem leaders in the Middle East and Pakistan saying, "No man can be a Communist and a Moslem at the same time." This is entirely obvious when you consider the profound dimension of religious depth in the traditional Islamic point of view and the profound dimension of anti-religious atheism in Marxism.

It is quite true that a theoretical Moslem could never be a theoretical Marxist, but, of course, this is no answer to our question because Soviet Russia *has* penetrated the Middle East. We can

only understand this by understanding the nature of the Soviet penetration. Very rarely is the problem posed to a Moslem in the Middle East, "Shall I be a Moslem or shall I be a Communist?" This is not the kind of challenge that Russia brings, and the basis of the Soviet success is not primarily in propagandizing the ideology of Communism.

After more than a decade of attempts to penetrate the Middle East by means of subversive Communist parties, Russia changed her tactics, dropped her direct Communist line and began to identify herself with the economic development, the social change and the political ambitions of the area. Until this period Nasser had been a "bourgeois nationalist" to the Russians and you know there is no more dirty term in the vocabulary of Communism than that. Now he became a "fighter for freedom." That is, the Soviet Union is presenting itself to the Middle East, not basically as a Communist force, but as a political, economic, social force seeking freedom, independence and growth of social justice. To people who are hungry for this kind of appeal, it falls on ears that are extremely receptive. You may recall that at the Cairo conference of the Afro-Asian group about two years ago, there was a Russian "observer." He made a statement to the conferences, saying in effect, "We know what it means to be hungry and poor and feudal and we are willing to help you in your fight against these things. Ask us what it is you want — economic aid, technicians, loans — and according to our ability we will give them to you with no strings attached, for we are concerned with the fight for human freedom." Now you can say, of course, that this was said with the tongue in cheek, but you see how such words speak to the minds and hearts of a people who are trying to recast their society. The choice in the Middle East is almost never a choice between Communism and Islam. It is a choice of having an Anglo-French force invade the Suez Canal or having the Russians help stop them; between having no High Dam because the United States won't finance it, or having Russia finance it. It is a choice between having a party in power like the Nuri el Said party in Iraq, one of the most repressive governments that Iraq had (although it had very good reasons

having them in power), or having a popular government to whose aid Russia would come immediately. Because the choices are not between Islam and Communism, but between (as they see it) independence and subservience, social development or a social stagnation, the Soviet Union has been able to move into this area and to have a startling success by avoiding a challenge to their Islamic convictions.

This is true of the masses of people and explains why the attitude toward Russia has changed so profoundly in many countries. In 1953 I traveled through the Arab world and in every place I went, I found the common people afraid of Russia because Russia was "Communist." But when I went through these same countries last summer, I found that few people were talking about Russia as Communist. Russia was the friend of the eastern struggle — the source of economic betterment, the giver of technicians. Russia had succeeded in divesting herself of the taint of Communism and was beginning to appear in this new light.

I say this is true for the common masses, but I think much more serious is the plight of the intellectuals upon whose world I touched briefly just a moment ago. This new class is really concerned with two things: it is concerned, first of all, with political opportunity. One thing that the old so-called "democratic" regimes of the Middle East almost never gave a place for, was for a real opposition party. They were an oligarchical type of government and many of the most vigorous minds of the younger generation were shut out from political activities and from any chance of engaging in a political career. And with this, as I already said, has been a growing demand that the old regimes be swept aside. You must do what Nasser did — get rid of the old, land-owning class, divide up the land, have a new deal, have a better society.

For people who are seeking new political importance and attacking an ancient regime, the Communist solution is dramatic. One trouble with our democratic approach to these problems is we have nothing *dramatic* to say. Our advice is, "Go slow, take it easy; it takes a long time to do this, you fellows aren't quite ready for it" — but the local Communist party (where it exists) or the

underground party, has a dramatic program of social change and political action. In Iraq and (to a lesser extent) in Syria the intellectual gravitated toward Communism, because there is a social and political vacuum within his class and his own mind and Communism is one of the few dramatic positive programs that offers to fill it. If the Middle East really goes Communist, it will be because the vacuum in the mind of the intellectual elite is filled with the dramatic appeal of Communism. It will not be because they consciously and carefully think through Marxism ideology.

And so I come back to say what I said at the beginning. Islam is not an inhibitor of Soviet penetration, any more than it is the decisive force in the reshaping of ancient political and social ways. Yet it does still retain within it certain forces that can be utilized in building the modern world. I think that if we are going to succeed in the Middle East, it will be partly because we take a fresher and deeper look at the Islamic heritage and understand more truly the method by which Communism strives to penetrate it.

## **BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH**

**Professor John S. Badeau**

*Present Position:* President, Near East Foundation, New York City.

*Schools:*

Union College, B.S. degree, 1924; D.D. degree, 1942.

New Brunswick Theological Seminary, 1925-28.

Rutgers University, B.D. degree, 1928.

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*Career Highlights:*

1924-25 Taught at Lyndhurst, L. I.

1926-28 Student pastor at Mariners Harbor Reformed Church, Staten Island

1928-35 Missionary under United Mission in Iraq.

1936-38 Associate professor of religion and philosophy, American University, Cairo.

1938-44 Dean of faculty arts and sciences, American University, Cairo.

1945-53 President, American University, Cairo.

1953-59 President, Near East Foundation.