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THEY SAID IT

At first sight, the phrase “Islamic fascism” seems a strange combination of words, since “fascism” refers to an anti-democratic movement born in Italy in 1919. It spread throughout Europe and among Christians and Muslims in the Arab Levant, particularly Palestine, up until the end of World War II. The characteristics of this movement, — created by a socialist, Benito Mussolini — exist in radical Islam, found both in the Sunni tendency and, as illustrated by the Iranian state, in the Shia. Like Islamism, Fascism functioned through a network of political militias (*fasci*) imposing, by violence and assassination, the rule of a charismatic leader, the dehumanization of the Jews, the suppression of freedom of the press and opinion, the elimination of all other parties, and the state control of the economy, culture, and propaganda. However, unlike Fascism, Islamism is deeply imbedded in a jihadist ideology, with its legal framework of permanent war derived from religious scriptures, consolidated by a history of 13 centuries of warfare, conquests, and subjugation of infidels. Unlike fascism, all its references are religious, and its hatred targets equally Jews and non-Jews. Codified in 8th-century Islamic jurisprudence, Islamist warfare tactics conform exactly to a sharia-jihadic worldview, set in an enduring, theological pattern. Similarities with fascism emerge from a shared totalitarian mechanism, despite divergences in the two movements. Promoters of jihadism define their actions as a jihad, using its terminology and history. But they object to Westerners adopting this view negatively since for Muslims jihad represents the highest sacred duty in the path of Allah, and it is this positive interpretation of jihad that they want to impose on its victims. Being unfamiliar with jihad, Westerners do not understand that the fight against terror is against a 21st-century jihad and they do not realize the breadth of its scope and constituents.

--*National Review Online* Symposium. Contribution by Bat Ye'or, author of many studies on the conditions of Jews and Christians in the context of the *jihad* ideology and the *sharia* law. Recent books include: *Islam and Dimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide* and *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis*.

SOME THOUGHTS ON “ISLAMIC FACISM.”

President Bush appears to have both jangled the sensitivities of the defenders of Islam and captured the attention of the intellectual community when he recently used the term “Islamic fascists.” While Muslims around the world described the phrase as an “insult to Islam,” *National Review Online* held a min-symposium in which numerous historians and think-tankers offered their views on the use of the term to describe those Muslims whom most of us have come to know as “Islamists,” “Islamic terrorists,” “radical Muslims,” representatives of “militant Islam,” and the bad guys in the “war on terror.”

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We here at the Political Forum have used the related phrase “Islamofascists” in these pages numerous times, but must confess that we have always been a little leery of it. On the plus side, it conjures up the requisite images of Islamically-inspired mass murder, anti-Semitism, brutality, totalitarianism, and antagonism toward freedom, democracy, capitalism, and religious tolerance in a way that is easily understood by people all over the world, including both the barely educated and the intelligentsia. Moreover, it has a nice pejorative ring to it, which, whether anyone else will admit it or not, is one of the reasons for the term’s recent popularity.

On the negative side, however, there are many drawbacks to using the adjective fascist to describe both the Islamic war against the West and the Muslim combatants in this war. For starters, it is, in actuality, of only limited value as an insult. After all, it seems unlikely that militant Muslims are all that deeply offended by being ideologically linked to a movement that was strongly associated with killing Jews. It’s a bit like calling Jeffrey Dahmer “antisocial.”

In fact, as indicated in the above “They Said It” quote from the highly respected scholar Bat Ye’or, many Middle Eastern Islamic leaders and ordinary followers of the Muslim faith enthusiastically embraced the fascist movement in the years preceding and during World War II and have retained an affection for it to this day.

Further lessening the depreciatory impact of using fascist and fascism to describe the murderous Muslim community is the fact that both terms have become extremely hackneyed during the past few decades as a result of constant use by the political left to describe all people and things that annoy them, from Rush Limbaugh to surveillance cameras in high crime neighborhoods. In the United States, at least, the accusation that one is a fascist is approaching the innocence of the taunt, “your mother wears combat boots.”

A second problem with the term “Islamic fascism” is the fact that the phrase projects an image of organizational cohesiveness that is starkly lacking among Islamists. The term fascism brings to mind a highly structured economic system, a secular

social/political ideology, and a form of centralized government that contains all the elements of a modern Western nation, including a functioning bureaucracy. The fascist governments of Italy, Germany, and Spain were highly structured and heavily bureaucratized. The threat that fascist Germany and Italy posed was a conventional military one. The evil was heavily concentrated in the leadership of the movement and flowed downward into the population. Victory against fascism was therefore predicated on the death of the fascist leaders.

The murderous Muslims that threaten the West today are united by little more than a common hatred for non-Muslims and a vague goal of “re-establishing” a mythical, medieval, utopian Caliphate that will rule the entire world. The movement itself controls no conventional army, subscribes to no commonly accepted plan for victory, controls no significant industrial base, and has no vast bureaucracy that ties it all together. In fact, many of the elements that make up this force hate each other as much as they hate their common enemy.

There are nation states involved in the movement, but none that is recognized by all participants as either its spiritual or practical center of power. Therefore, unlike fascism, the evil inherent in the movement does not emanate downward from a powerful cadre of leaders, but springs forth from the foundational ideology like worms from a rotten cheese. As such, destroying one group or any individual leader does not necessarily bring the overall battle any closer to a conclusion.

It is fair to say that all of the elements that collectively comprise the militant Islamic movement have fascist characteristics. But this explains nothing about their motivation and their ultimate goals. It is descriptive but not definitional. When considering this it is worth keeping in mind that fascism was a purely Western phenomenon, unique to a time and place in the history of Europe. It was not a radical version of Christianity, as Islamism is of Islam. Fascism was a secular, reactionary movement. It grew out of socialism and communism, which were secular, reactionary movements in and of themselves. Elements of fascism may have been borrowed by other cultures. But in most cases, when fascist tendencies are

discovered outside of Europe, a close examination will find that they are homegrown rather than imported and spring from a common tendency among mankind to embrace evil.

Finally, the real problem with using various derivations of the word fascism in reference to Islamic radicalism is that it facilitates the avoidance of using the proper terms for defining the movement, terms that tend to be avoided by politicians and pundits because they are not considered to be politically correct and may incite Muslim indignation. I am referring, of course, to *jihad*, *jihadism*, and *jihadists*, which are not only descriptive but also definitional, and if widely employed, defined, and explained would better inform Americans of the real nature of the threat they face than would any reference to fascism.

As Bat Ye'or notes above, the term *jihad* correctly identifies the legal framework of the militant Islamic movement, its origin, its centuries long history, its religious significance, and the shared beliefs that make all devout Muslims sympathetic to the movement even if they sometimes disagree with the means by which some Muslims pursue it.

To understand *jihad* is to understand that the war being waged against the West by the *jihadists* is a permanent war between all devout Muslims all over the world and everyone else. Each Muslim fights this war differently, but all devout Muslims share the goal and applaud the gains made in pursuit of this goal. To understand *jihad* is to understand that there are many fronts in this war and that victory by the West on one front does not assure victory on any of the others, yet defeat on one strengthens Islamism on all of the others. It is a war that is being fought in streets of Baghdad and the mountains of Afghanistan, in the working class neighborhoods of Paris, London, and Dearborn, in the American Congress and U.S. courts of law, in the slums and the ornate palaces of the Middle East, and most likely will be fought one day in the skies over Iran.

The following excerpts from Bat Ye'or's excellent and informative book *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam, From Jihad to Dhimmitude*, published in 1996, provides insights into this unique, Islamic

belief. To fully understand these paragraphs is to fully understand that the on-going war between the *jihadists* and everyone else is likely to last for a very long time and get more intense as it goes along. More importantly, it is to understand that it is a war from which the West can neither run nor hide.

The aim of *jihad* is to subjugate the peoples of the world to the law of Allah, decreed by his prophet Muhammad. Mankind is divided into two groups, Muslims and non-Muslims. The former compose the Islamic community, the *umma*, who own the territories of the *dar al-Islam* governed by Islamic law. Non-Muslims are *barbis*, inhabitants of the *dar al-I barb*, the lands of war, so called because they are destined to come under Islamic jurisdiction, either by war (*barb*), or by the conversion of their inhabitants. According to the juriconsult Ibn Taimiya (fourteenth century), the property of non-Muslims must revert legitimately to the sole followers of the true religion (Islam). Consequently, the *jihad* is the means whereby possessions considered illegally usurped by non-Muslims are restored to Muslims. That is why every act of war in the *dar at-barb* is legal and immune from censure.

As the *jihad* is a permanent war, it excludes the idea of peace but authorizes temporary truces related to the political situation (*muhadana*). These truces must not last for more than ten years at most and can be unilaterally denounced by the imam, after notifying the adversary. In the context of temporary truces, the *jihad* governs the conditions of treaties with the *dar al-barb* and provides for an intermediate state of non-war or of vassality. The holy war, regarded by Islamic theologians as one of the pillars of the faith, is incumbent on all Muslims; they have to contribute to it according to their capacities, by their persons, their property, or their writings.

Jihad can be waged by military means, as occurred during the period of the great Arab expansion (seventh to eighth century), and later by the Islamized Turks in Europe. The strategy of war provides for the destabilization at the frontiers of the *dar al-harb* by irregular forces -- burn villages, take hostages, or pillage and massacre in order to drive out the inhabitants and facilitate the army's advance by gradual territorial encroachment. The methods of dividing the booty are governed by Koranic revelations, one fifth reverting to the custodian of spiritual political authority (the imam or caliph).

Jihad can also be waged by peaceful means: proselytism, propaganda, and corruption which consists of gratuities "to win over hearts" (*ta'rif al-qulub*). The *harbi*, inhabitants of the lands of war, is an enemy who cannot venture without risk into the lands of Islam where, according to the dogma, any Muslim may shed his blood and seize his goods. However, his safety can be ensured by the *aman*, a temporary protection which any Muslim of either sex can grant.

When a victory transforms some of the *dar al-harb* into *dar al-Islam*, its former inhabitants (*harbis*) become prisoners of war. The imam can, according to the circumstances of the conflict, condemn them to massacre, slavery, exile, or negotiate with their representatives and grant them a treaty of protection (*dhimma*), which confers on them the status of tributaries (dhimmis). The dhimmi status resulting directly from the *jihad* is linked to this contract which suspends the initial right of the victor over the vanquished, providing the latter agree to pay tribute and submit to Islam, following the example of agreements that the Prophet made with the Jews and Christians whom he subjugated.

SHADES OF MUNICH?

In the week or so since Israel signed on to the U.S.-brokered U.N. Resolution 1701, which brought an end to the immediate hostilities between the Jewish state and the Iranian proxy Hezbollah, a great many conservatives and other friends of Israel have concluded that this was not just a mere mistake, but a colossal blunder. These critics are not only unwilling to buy the Bush-Rice, American-Israeli spin that the ceasefire represents a victory for Israel and a significant defeat for Hezbollah, but are convinced that the agreement is a archetypal example of political cowardice that virtually ensures that there will be a later reckoning with the forces of radical Islam, a reckoning that will take place on the Islamists' terms.

We are not entirely sure if talking points were distributed to conservative pundits on subject, but the criticism of the ceasefire has been both uniform and widespread, with the general consensus being that this agreement constitutes the 21st century's "Munich." Historian Arthur Herman explained the basic argument thusly:

Historians will look back at this weekend's cease-fire agreement in Lebanon as a pivotal moment in the war on terror. It is pivotal in the same sense that the Munich agreement between Adolf Hitler and Neville Chamberlain was pivotal in an earlier battle against the enemies of freedom. The accord in October 1938 revealed to the world that the solidarity of the Western allies was a sham, and that the balance of power had shifted to the fascist dictators.

Resolution 1701 shows that, for the time being at least, the balance has likewise shifted to the terrorists and their state sponsors. Like Munich, it marks the triumph of the principle of putting off until tomorrow what needs to be done today. Like Munich, it will mean not peace in our time, but a bigger war in our future.

Given the pervasiveness of this “Munich” meme in the discussion of the ceasefire, we thought it might be instructive to take just a brief look at the notorious agreement reached in that German city nearly seventy years ago and to examine its relevance to current conditions in the Middle East. So here goes.

For nearly seven decades now, the name Neville Chamberlain and the town of Munich have been virtually synonymous with the terms “appeasement” and “capitulation.” And for good reason.

In the aftermath of the Anschluss in March of 1938, the British Prime Minister Chamberlain and his French counterpart, Edouard Daladier, had both concluded that war between their countries and the Axis powers was unthinkable, despite Hitler’s clear provocations. And thus on September 29 of that year, the two agreed in Munich to accept Germany’s demand for control of the Sudetenland, the disputed Czech territory with a predominantly German population. In return, Hitler promised to resolve all future disputes by peaceful means, prompting Chamberlain, upon his return to England, to declare infamously that “for the second time in our history, a British Prime Minister has returned from Germany bringing peace with honour,” and to claim that the agreement had brought “peace for our time.”

Of course, as every schoolboy knows, Hitler was not exactly negotiating in good faith. And within six months, the Munich agreement was in shambles, and all of Czechoslovakia was under German control. And within a year, Poland too was under control of Hitler’s Reich and all of Europe was again at war.

Now, far be it from us to take on the mammoth challenge of trying to rehabilitate Chamberlain or to defend his actions. His reputation as a pusillanimous and delusional appeaser is well earned. And certainly his successor, Winston Churchill, was correct in noting that Chamberlain misjudged “the facts at the time” and thus failed to grasp that “Honour pointed the path of Duty.”

At the same time, it is worth keeping in mind, we think, the historical context in which Chamberlain’s failure of honor and duty took place. After the continent-wide tragedy of The Great War, many Europeans, and the Brits and the French in particular,

were convinced that there should be no more such wars and that war in general should be avoided at all costs. After all, The Great War had also been known as “the war to end all wars.”

In 1933, the illustrious Oxford Union famously (infamously?) adopted a motion pledging that “This House would under no circumstances fight for its King and country” again. And as military historian Victor Davis Hanson has noted, “No responsible postwar leader wished to risk a second continental bloodbath . . . British intellectuals, like European Union idealists today, wrote books and treatises on the obsolescence of war.”

More to the point, many of the governments of Europe acted upon their stated desire to avoid war by severely limiting their abilities to fight them. Throughout the 1920s, the Brits in particular slashed their military budgets and, in so doing, slashed their military capabilities. In 1919, the government of David Lloyd George adopted the “Ten-year Rule,” which dictated that the British armed forces should be funded based on the presumption that they would not be involved in a “great war” for at least ten years. According to Historian Paul Kennedy, British military expenditures shrank from £766 million in 1919-20 to £189 million in 1921-22 and £102 million in 1932. The capabilities of both the British Army and the Royal British Navy were drastically reduced throughout the inter-war period.

All of this is to say that when Chamberlain refused to face the challenge presented by Hitler’s aggression head on, he wasn’t exactly restraining the world’s most powerful armed forces. Though history has clearly shown that he was foolish to have forestalled the inevitable and more foolish still to have believed that a man like Hitler could be trusted or appeased, it is not difficult to see Chamberlain’s motives, flawed though they were.

And while the overwhelming preponderance of historical sentiment, including Churchill’s definitive analysis, argues that Chamberlain’s weakness served to exacerbate and to prolong the inexorable war, there is a school of thought that suggests that the Prime Minister’s hesitation was not an unmitigated disaster. Indeed, in a discussion on this very topic over the weekend at the Poweline blog, historian John

Steele Gordon suggested that in at least one aspect of war preparation, the delay bought by Chamberlain's appeasement was crucial. As Steele notes, between September 1938 and September 1939 (the signing of Munich and the outbreak of war), the Royal Air Force was, at Chamberlain's discretion, vastly enlarged, "growing from 5 to 47 squadrons." And as Steele concludes, this meant that:

The Royal Air Force was relatively stronger vis-a-vis the Luftwaffe in September, 1939, than in September, 1938. It was still miserably weak, to be sure. But had the Battle of Britain been fought in the summer of 1939 instead of a year later, those few to whom so much is owed would not have been able to save the many.

Again, the point here is not to defend Chamberlain, but to suggest that things didn't have to turn out the way they did, even after he and Daladier had signed the agreement in Munich. Munich was a mistake, but it only became an unmitigated disaster in the year after its signing, when Chamberlain persisted in his delusion about the nature of his nation's enemies and about the ultimate effect of his accord with that enemy. Clearly, Chamberlain was willing and able to rearm to the Royal Air Force. If he had been a little less enamored with the idea that peace at any cost was both possible and desirable and if he had been more level-headed about the situation, he could have ramped up rearmament throughout the armed forces and prepared his nation for war, thereby correcting the mistakes of the disarmament movement and making the most of the time that his initial capitulation had purchased.

But he wasn't. And he didn't.

While we suspect that the critics of the Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire haven't thought about their assessment in quite these terms, we think that this is where the Munich analogy makes the greatest sense. Certainly, it is not unreasonable to question the sagacity of this ceasefire agreement, and certainly it is not unreasonable to presume that this agreement holds the potential to be a truly dreadful event in

human history. At the same time, we believe that it is worth remembering the context in which this agreement was signed, just as with Munich.

You see, as in interwar Britain, one of the most vocal and successful constituencies within Israel over the last two decades was the "peace first" crowd, which not only argued that peace with the nation's enemies was a moral imperative but set about modifying public policy in order to achieve that goal. According to the newspaper *Haaretz*, like Chamberlain at Munich, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert didn't enter into conflict/negotiations with his nation's enemies from a position of particular strength. Last week, the (leftwing) paper reported the following:

Just one day before the evil came down from the north, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert came to the land of the bed and breakfasts and was given a briefing by senior Israel Defense Forces officers. One of them, Major General Itzhak Harel, who for two and a half years has been heading the Plans and Policy Directorate, took advantage of the opportunity to exchange a few words with the high-level visitor about the security budget.

"I will be completing my service in three weeks," said the major general, who did not realize his release would have to wait a few more weeks. "As a citizen, I am asking you to preserve a strong state." Harel went on: "The IDF is hollow. Don't cut any more from the security budget."

This was not the first time Olmert had heard the army is not properly prepared for war. The previous director general of the Defense Ministry, Kobi Toren, had sung him the same tunes when the prime minister came for his first meeting with the General Staff.

If this is true; if, in fact, the Israeli Defense Forces are "hollow"; if the decade-plus since the signing of the disastrous Oslo accords has seen devastating military

budget cuts and the denigration of the IDF's ability to wage war, then the ceasefire is cast in a significantly different light.

Does this necessarily mean that signing the agreement was a smart move? No. But it does mean that the Israeli leadership quite likely had determined that it was in over its head in Lebanon and had, therefore, to figure out a way to stall. Like Chamberlain before him, Olmert undoubtedly came to the conclusion that this war at this point under these conditions was unwinnable. And he did what he had to do to stop it. And in this sense, U.N. Resolution 1701 is, indeed, reminiscent of Munich.

The question now is how much like Munich will the agreement prove to be. If Olmert and his American patrons, George Bush and Condoleezza Rice, actually believe now and continue to believe that such a peace as produced by this ceasefire can be guaranteed "long term," then critics like Arthur Herman will be proven prescient, and the whole mess will, in fact, be "a greater blunder" than Munich. But, at the very least, that is something that we cannot know at this point.

If the affected parties are, instead, aware of the nature of enemy; if they are aware that the enemy no more desires peace than Hitler did; and if they therefore intend to use this break in the action to whatever advantage they can, including rebuilding the capacity for war and reassessing plans for war in light of the information acquired during the brief foray into Lebanon, then the Munich analogy can be circumvented.

There is no question that the parallels between today and 1938 are numerous and striking. There is a reason that military and intelligence analysts and historians like Michael Ledeen and Victor Davis Hanson agree that the current state of geopolitical affairs is reminiscent of the late interwar period, that period in which Germany had made its intentions known, yet the rest of the West chose to ignore those warning signs. History does, indeed, repeat itself.

But it doesn't repeat itself perfectly.

For starters, the Israelis are in the unfortunate position of having no Churchill on whom to call to save them. The closest thing to such a man unfortunately lies in a near vegetative state, having suffered his fatal stroke six months before the war, rather than 20 years after its conclusion, as Churchill did. That means that the Israelis will have to make do without the type of statesman who possesses both an unalloyed moral clarity and an uncanny ability to convince his fellow countrymen to "never give in – never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy."

At the same time, the Israelis possess a sense of history and reality that eluded most Britons in 1938. This, in turn, means that either Prime Minister Olmert will use this lull to make ready for the inevitable coming war or he will be turned out by the voters. The Israelis have been through enough since the founding of their state and, more recently, since the commencement of the second *intifada* that they are unlikely to view "appeasement" or "capitulation" as benevolently as did the Brits. Olmert will either prepare for war or prepare for retirement.

One final and potentially disturbing question in this scenario is what role President Bush will play. To continue the Munich/1938 analogy, on the one hand, it would be nice if Bush, like Roosevelt before him, understands the threat posed by the enemy and thus will do whatever he can to keep our ally in this battle sufficiently supplied and armed. On the other hand, one can only hope that Bush won't succumb to the type of political despair that immobilized Roosevelt. Roosevelt likely understood the threat to the free world posed by the Axis powers, but he also understood the difficulty in convincing his isolationist political opponents to allow him to deal with that threat. In the end, he was either unable or unwilling to overcome that difficulty and thus did not manage to convince either his foes or the country about the threat. Until after Pearl Harbor, that is.

There is no doubt in our minds that President Bush intends to prosecute the war against radical Islam as aggressively as possible. The question now is what is possible, given the clearly dysfunctional state of our politics. Prime Minister Olmert's challenge in avoiding a repeat of the 1938 tragedy is daunting enough, but at least he has the support of both the public and most of the ruling class. President Bush, by contrast, faces a political opposition that will deny the problem, largely out of spite. If Bush is unable to overcome this challenge, then it's likely irrelevant whether Olmert can overcome his. In that case, the tragedy of September 29, 1938 will, indeed, be repeated.

More ominously, the tragedies of December 7, 1941 and September 11, 2001 will be repeated as well.

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