What will be the face of Islam in the twenty-first century? A preoccupation with the future is always acute at the turning of a century, still more so at the turning of a millennium. About world future thinking, the optimistic ‘Endism’ of Francis Fukuyama to the pessimistic ‘Clash of Civilizations’ of Samuel Huntington, is already well under way in the West.

In the predictions of these generalists, Islam and the Muslim world receive fairly short shrift, at least as far as their internal evolution is concerned. The generalists have been criticized by the area specialists, on the usual grounds that the generalists do not know enough about Islam or Muslims to generalize. But the critics have yet to engage in the same kind of trolled speculation, or to provide alternatives of their own. Over the last century, the most comprehensive prediction for the future of Islam has been in its rearrangement along Western lines. Commenting on the trend in Islamic thought in the 1880s, the English poet-explor- er Wilfred Scawen Blunt wrote that ‘it stood in close analogy to what we have seen of the reawakening of the Christian intellect during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Europe and its adaptation of orthodox doctrines to the sci- entific discoveries of the day.’ An American observer thought the idea this way in 1963: ‘Perhaps the Arab world in this century is in the first pages of a renaissance that may ultimately be comparable to the changes that took place in Western society in the fifthteenth century. If my suspicion is correct,’ writes a leading Amer- ican anthropologist in 1998, ‘we will look back on the latter half of the 20th century as a time of change as profound for the Muslim world as the Protestant Reformation was for Christen- dom.’

This expectation of reform is a recurring theme in the Western vision of Islam. It leaves nothing to predict but the proximate emergence of a Luther, followed by the mod- ernizing of the ruler in the same fashion and the emergence of democratic governance. Yet while the twenti- eth century has been the stage of numerous ‘revolutions’ in the name of the people or the nation or Islam, it could well be argued that Muslims have failed to resolve issues which appeared on their agenda a century ago. Indeed, the more instructive analogy may not be with the nineteenth century in Europe, but with the end of the nineteenth century in the Middle East.

1900 and 2000: B A C K  T O  T H E  F U T U R E

Indeed, there are striking parallels between the end of the nineteenth century and the end of the twentieth. And if repetition is one possi- ble scenario, analogous reasoning may offer some clue to the future.

The global context

It did not happen. In the twentieth century, some Muslims simply abandoned the idea of constitutional reform altogether, and when that access has been challenged, the US largely acts off shore, without the need for prolonged occupa- tion. Might it even be reversed? There are signs that the Islamist surge has been made by a millenarian and Mahdist form, had defied the US largely acts off shore, without the need for prolonged occupa- on. Might it even be reversed? There are signs that the Islamist surge has been

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