



Walter Posch

Islam in Europe and US Security

22 April 2005, UC Berkeley's Center on Institutions and Governance
(with the support of the EU Institute for Security Studies)

The EU ISS co-sponsored¹ a Conference on Democracy and Global Islam held on the Berkeley campus on Friday, 22 April 2005 organised by the Center on Institutions and Governance (<http://igov.berkeley.edu>) based at UC Berkeley's Institute of Governmental Studies (<http://igs.berkeley.edu>), with the collaboration of Professor Olivier Roy, Humanities & Social Sciences Department, Centre national de la Recherche scientifique Paris. The conference was organised in three panels, with a concluding roundtable (see programme attached). The presentations were digitalized and are available at UC Berkeley's web site.²

CONFERENCE AIMS, SPEAKERS AND PARTICIPANTS

The conference aimed to go beyond the boundaries of existing academic fields like area studies (Middle East, Central Asia etc.) or Islamology (that is, the study of Islamic religion and history) and to study the relationship between Muslims, globalisation, the reinterpretation of Islam and democracy. A wide variety of issues were analysed, ranging from the recruitment and motivation of al-Qaeda operatives and African Islam in exile, to Muslim democracy and new Islamic cultural phenomena like 'Muslim hard-rock' (sic). The conference was well attended by scholars and students from UCB and other San Francisco Bay Area universities, as well as by interested members of the public, journalists and clerics of many faiths and a small group of Muslims living and studying in the USA; the latter were less ignorant about Europe and Islam than the former. Paul Wolfowitz, however, had to cancel his participation since he had been nominated head of the World Bank.

¹ Other sponsors have been: UC Berkeley's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the French Department, the Institute of European Studies, the International and Area Studies, the Townsend Center, and the Center for Southeast Asia Studies.

² <http://webcast.berkeley.edu/events/details.html?event_id=208>.

TALKING POINTS OF PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION

1. *Globalisation and the practice of Islam*

Globalisation tends to disconnect Islam as a religion from Islam as a culture. This is especially true in a ‘modern environment’, and happens through the modernisation of a hitherto conservative Muslim society, or results from the experience of the Muslim ‘diaspora’ in Europe or North America.³ As a result, a growing number of Muslims tend to be more observant of religious practices and more dogmatic in their theology.

In traditional Muslim societies, such as Egypt, the change to dogmatism has been a reaction to modernity: private, unofficial organisations have instilled greater awareness of Islam and its obligations among citizens. And in the end the state has become as much a promoter of Islam in society as, for instance the Muslim Brotherhood.

In the diaspora, one may embrace modernism but remain or, as in many cases, become more dogmatic. The dogma remains unchanged (religiously permitted - *halal* vs. forbidden *haram*) in a globalised environment (‘fast food’), so that ‘fast food’ for example, becomes ‘Islamic’ as ‘*halal* fast food’.

The re-shaping of Muslim identity – dogmatic but disconnected from the culture in which the religion originates – has been compared to the ‘born again’ experience among some denominations in the USA. The Salafists, for instance, have been directly compared to the ‘evangelicals’.

2. *The Islamic diaspora in Europe*

“Global Islam” also means Islam in the diaspora or Muslims as minorities. Although sizeable Muslim minorities live all over the world (e.g. in Russia, China, India, Philippines and, to a lesser degree, South America) only Muslims in North America and Western Europe were discussed at the conference.

American speakers remarked on the insufficient integration of Europe’s huge Muslim population into European society, as contrasted with Muslim immigrants to the USA, where ‘multiculturalism’ works, they maintained, better than in Europe. “There is no European dream” (as opposed to the American dream) became an all-embracing catch phrase to highlight the difference between the declared success of the US model and the alleged failure of Europe’s. The integration of Muslims in Silicon Valley was cited as an example.

The perceived non-integration of Europe’s Muslims was interpreted as a security risk for the US. Alluding to the membership of al-Qaeda, with its

³ The term “diaspora” was used throughout the conference to describe Muslims who have left their countries of origin mostly due to workers’ migration. However, a better and more scholarly expression would have been “migrant Islam” or “immigrant Islam”, for the term “diaspora” has a clear historical connotation.

many second and even third generation Muslims from European immigrant communities, American speakers concluded that Muslim dissatisfaction with the situation in Europe was the main source, motivation and driving force for Islamist violence against the USA. This conviction was shared by many in the public who obviously preferred to see social/religious/cultural parameters (read: Europe and Islam, or Islam in Europe) as root causes and chose to deny any possible connection between US foreign policy and Islamist terrorism. One American participant said what many thought: “Is the US paying the price for Europe’s struggle with multiculturalism?” European speakers, of course, rejected this question right away and responded with a long list of examples of how US foreign policy had directly caused or aggravated Muslim embitterment. However, there was a general feeling that responsibility for radical Islam lay with Europe.

3. *Al-Qaeda*

The diaspora, admittedly, plays an important role in al-Qaeda, as overseas communities have with other terrorist movements (IRA, ETA ...). The ‘born again’ phenomenon and the disconnection of Islam and traditional culture are found in the background of most al-Qaeda operatives. Young activists (84% under 26 years of age) turn to religion in order to overcome personal inadequacies like alcoholism and become ‘born again’. They encounter their kindred spirits in certain Mosques and join the jihad movement in order to belong to an elite circle of friends. However, being an elite means being exclusive, and only 15% to 25% of those who want to join al-Qaeda are accepted.

Al-Qaeda’s aim is not religious but political: they want to throw out the US from the Middle East region, a well-known and completely traditional anti-imperialist pattern. Their religious doctrine, too, is very simplistic and void of deeper theological and/or theoretical discourse. One reason may be that 82% of them are educated in technical studies. Trying to de-legitimise their cause by theological discussion is therefore a futile endeavour, because they would not understand the argumentation.

4. *Islam in selected Regions*

a. Africa

Doctrinal change can be observed within African Islam. Whereas Islamisation in East Africa is tantamount to Arabisation, West African Islam is an integral part of West African culture. Here, local Islam has been strong enough to challenge Christian influence in Nigeria and Congo and win over converts.

Traditional mystical brotherhoods in Senegal (Muridiyya and Tijaniyya), whose followers have resettled in the USA, combine their religious-mystical bonds with economic expertise. As a result, their followers have been able to create numerous “faith-based enterprises”, which has strengthened their self-confidence. Other experiences in the diaspora, like the outright rejection of African imams by Arabs, reinforce the African-ness of the expatriate

communities too. The close connection of diaspora communities with the centres of the brotherhoods in Senegal in due course raises African-awareness or outspoken African-consciousness at home Africanising Senegal's Islam even more.

b. Bosnia

In Bosnia, Muslims have been disconnected from the wider Islamic world throughout the 20th century. Therefore they have clung to old traditions, which now, as contacts with the wider Islamic world are re-established, are coming under stress. However, secularism and traditional Islam are adhered to by the vast majority of Bosnia's Muslims who in any case have to overcome the traumatic experience of their near-extinction in the 1990s.

5. *Islam and democracy*

As expected, Muslim speakers rejected any argument that presumed Islam was the cause of the lack of democracy in the Middle East. Secularism, one prerogative for democracy, was discussed too. But the separation of church and state hardly ever applied to the Muslim world, since there was no "church". In Islamic countries the clerical class took care of "shari'a"/Islamic law. But the latter functioned rather as a legal than a theological set of rules and regulations. The clerical class had always distinguished between religious duties and general societal duties like market regulations. The distinction between the sphere of personal piety and public life could therefore be interpreted as "secular". (One participant, however, pointed out that "you can't be secular and a Muslim without explanation", a notion that went unchallenged.)

In general, the American Muslim speakers convinced the conference that there was no correlation between Islam and the lack of democracy in the region, though most of them remained extremely sceptical about the prospects of democratising the region. Other Americans saw the January 2005 elections in Iraq as the turning point for a positive future for the region and beyond. European participants were more sceptical.

WHY THE EUISS SHOULD REMAIN INVOLVED IN THE DEBATE

As stated above, the organisers aimed to encompass traditional academic fields in order to open a debate on Globalised Islam and Democracy. It is widely believed that this conference was the first in what will be a series, and the organisers have already reached out to other academic institutions and think tanks. Europe should be aware of and actively take part in the evolving debate in order to influence as much as possible the American discussion on Islam in Europe and its implications for US security. The argument mentioned in point 2 of this report – that the social and political situation of Europe's Muslims is the main reason for al-Qaeda's terrorism against the USA – seems to be widespread among interested members of the public, academics and think tanks in the US. If the American debate on Islam in Europe gains more importance

and continues to be simplistic and one-sided as described, it is likely to lead to unnecessary and potentially damaging polemics on both sides of the Atlantic.

Panels

Introductory remarks:

Heddy **Riss**, The Center for Institutions and Governance, UC Berkeley

Bruce **Cain**, Director of the Institute of Governmental Studies, UC Berkeley

- Panel 1: *Globalization and Its Impact on Muslim Practices*
Chair: Nezar **Alsayyad**, Chair of the Center of Middle Eastern Studies, UC Berkeley

Olivier **Roy**, Research Associate, Humanities & Social Sciences, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris

Mark **LeVine**, Professor of History, UC Irvine; expert on Middle East and Islamic history, theology, globalization, and political economy

Saba **Mahmood**, Professor, Department of Anthropology, UC Berkeley; expert on postcolonial secularism, with attention to issues of subject formation, religiosity, embodiment, and gender

Ahmed **Alibasic**, Deputy President of the Society of Ulama of Bosnia-Herzegovina

- Panel 2: *Globalization and Its Impact on Islamic Doctrine*
Chair: Steven **Fish**, Professor, Political Science, UC Berkeley

Marc **Sageman**, Adjunct Professor of Psychology, Solomon Asch Center for Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict, University of Pennsylvania; ex-CIA; author of *Understanding Terror Networks*

Abdoulaye **Kane**, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of Florida; specialist on transnational networks of Senegalese migrants living in diaspora

Jocelyne **Cesari**, Faculty of Arts and Sciences; Divinity School, Harvard University; author of *Islam, Globalization, and the West*

Aziz **Huq**, Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law; legal scholar specializing on democratic constitutionalism in Afghanistan, Nepal, and Pakistan

- Panel 3: *Islam and the Values of Democracy*
Chair: John **Lie**, Dean of the Institute of International and Area Studies, UC Berkeley

Khaled **Abou El Fadl**, Professor of Law, UCLA School of Law; expert on Islamic law, immigration, human rights, international and national security law

Justo **Lacunza Balda**, Catholic priest; head of the Pontifical Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, Rome, Italy

Dale **Eickelman**, Professor of Anthropology, Dartmouth College; specialist on the new media in the Arab world

- Roundtable: *Islam and Conflict*
Chair: Bruce **Cain**, Director of the Institute of Governmental Studies, UC Berkeley

Olivier **Roy**, Research Associate, Humanities & Social Sciences, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris

Nadia **Yassine**, Spokesperson, al-Adl wal-Ihsan (Justice and Charity) Islamist Movement

Gunter **Mulack**, Ambassador at the German Foreign Office in Berlin and the Minister's Commissioner for Germany's Dialogue with the Islamic World

Ali **Ferdowsi**, Professor of History and Political Science, Notre Dame de Namur University

Hatem **Bazian**, Lecturer in Near Eastern and Ethnic Studies, UC Berkeley; specialist on Muslim immigration and settlements in the Bay Area