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On the first day, Peter Bergen led a discussion on violent Islamic networks and their meaning for U.S. policy. He focused most of his remarks on al-Qaida. The good news is that public polling data suggests al-Qaida is losing ground in the Muslim world, and that it has many critics, even within the jihadist movement. This has caught the attention of the leadership, who are worried that bin Laden is losing the ideological battle. One reason is that al-Qaida took it upon itself to define 99% of Muslims as apostates, and therefore justified attacks on fellow Muslims. This has become extremely unpopular in most Islamic countries. Al-Qaida continues to conduct most of its battles in the media, and there are increasing questions being asked as to what it really stands for. It now has many enemies, and finds it impossible to align itself with mass movements.

The bad news is that they are still active, as the July 7, 2005 attacks in London and the attempts to bring down American planes flying to the United States from Britain attest. The increased activity of the Taliban in Afghanistan, who have cooperated with al-Qaida, suggests that they are not by any means quiescent. Among the violent acts al-Qaida is likely to pursue in the future would be to step up attacks on Jewish interests, oil facilities, and Western hotels. It will try to bring down more commercial jets, and may even attempt a radiological attack on a European city (U.S. cities seem more secure). Bin Laden seems likely to survive; his illnesses have been wildly exaggerated. It is unlikely al-Qaida will lose its sanctuary in Pakistan. The focus of its efforts now will be on manipulating European militants, many of whom are native born from immigrant families.

In the subsequent discussion, there was much focus on the role of Pakistan in enabling al-Qaida and the Taliban to continue their activities in Afghanistan and throughout Pakistan itself. While there is very little chance that either the Taliban or al-Qaida can overthrow the Pakistani government, there are difficult disputes between the United States and Pakistan on how to handle the Taliban. The problem is the militants in the frontier provinces have defeated the Pakistani army and the situation today in Afghanistan is deteriorating.

In Iraq, al-Qaida may be on the run but it will remain a spoiler and won’t give up. As to who is al-Qaida’s primary enemy, it was suggested that the United States remains number one because of its presence in the Middle East. This is why the U.S. rather than Russia and China has been the subject of al-Qaida’s wrath. The question was raised whether the ‘global war on terror’, conducted by the United States and its allies, has

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**Rapporteur’s Summary**

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In Iraq, al-Qaida may be on the run but it will remain a spoiler and won’t give up. As to who is al-Qaida’s primary enemy, it was suggested that the United States remains number one because of its presence in the Middle East. This is why the U.S. rather than Russia and China has been the subject of al-Qaida’s wrath. The question was raised whether the ‘global war on terror’, conducted by the United States and its allies, has
proven to be a gift for al-Qaida. And if it has, should we change our approach? It was suggested that we haven’t really focused on what sort of war it is we want to fight. There are some general principles that should be adhered to: first, ‘do no harm’. But it must be remembered there is a military component to counter-terrorism. Most important, it is essential to disaggregate various enemies and understand the nature of the individuals that make up al-Qaida. Many of them do not come from madrassas, but rather from educated circles, suggesting a complex relationship between the sociology of the Islamic world and the propensity to conduct terrorist acts. In discussing the relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaida, it was argued that the Taliban can continue a low-grade insurgency, but one should not exaggerate their potential in Afghanistan. The United States is still supported by most Afghans, but this could change. Although the base support for al-Qaida is falling, the United States needs to more successfully exploit its failings and do more to cut off its funds. The problem for al-Qaida is that while terror is cheap, managing an insurgency requires considerable assets, including a sanctuary. Although many of the insurgents do not collect salaries, cutting off money can weaken an insurgency, whether it is in Iraq or Afghanistan.

It was seen as preferable that the United States refocus its efforts to fighting al-Qaida rather than the broader confrontation with Islamic extremism. Finding or killing Usama bin Laden would be a huge asset for the allies. In this context, the question about attacking potential targets in Pakistan that may contain al-Qaida elements was discussed. The problem here is that it is essential to avoid civilian casualties, and the admonition ‘do no harm’ remains especially relevant in this case, given the sensitivity of the Pakistani public to issues of sovereignty and their general dislike of the United States. The scarier question of whether or not al-Qaida could acquire weapons of mass destruction was considered. The terrorists have been very unsuccessful in developing weapons of mass destruction. Much more plausible is the fear that they could exploit biotechnology as a lethal device against Western targets.

In looking for solutions in Afghanistan, it is important to understand the history of Afghanistan, and that when the United States came to support the insurgents against the Soviet invasion, they backed the Northern Alliance rather than the Pashtuns. The Pashtuns have never accepted the dominance by Arabs or the Northern Alliance, and today the problem is that the Pashtuns remain ambivalent about the United States and provide sanctuaries for al-Qaida and the Taliban. In this regard, it is critical that the United States continue to go after training camps and on-site activities that actually support the al-Qaida insurgency. This is a more important priority than closing down their internet activity; much more could be done in this regard if the various internet owners, who are mainly located in the United States, were to enforce their own laws about what can and cannot be used online.

In a concluding discussion on policy options of the United States, some felt that for the last seven years we have gone “heavy and expensive” in our war on terrorism, and that now is the time to be more nuanced. A comparison of how much money we spent on foreign aid compared with military aid suggests that more investment in eradicating poverty and improving education should be a priority, and that it is necessary to reexamine the relative weight of U.S. money provided to these two accounts, particularly in countries like Pakistan. We need more effective, targeted foreign aid, and the need to motivate the local population, and to train police forces and encourage national service. In addition, the United States needs to bring in more regional players to resolve both the crises in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The problem is that al-Qaida is resilient, although it is in trouble. One way to think about the confrontation is to consider it as dealing with a criminal organization, and avoid phrases such as the ‘war on terrorism’ and the ‘clash of civilizations’. We need to keep the problems in perspective. After the attacks of
9/11, the United States had a great opportunity to isolate al-Qaida. However, the effort was not sustained, in part because of the diversion caused by the war in Iraq. It not only drained resources, but, unlike Afghanistan, alienated our regional friends who had been so supportive after the 9/11 attacks.

The second day’s discussion was initiated by Shafeeq Ghabra. His focus was on the state of play in Middle East politics. He suggested there are four competing models at work, although there is clear overlap between each model.

The first model concerns the existing authoritarian regimes, with Egypt and Saudi Arabia being leading examples. The second model was termed “puritanical theocracy”; this has been growing for the past 30 years, and it calls for establishment of an Islamic state and the implementation of *sharia* law. The clearest example is the Islamic Republic of Iran. The third option, the developmental model, refers to the smaller states such as the United Arab Emirates, flush with oil money, that have become amazingly liberal on economic issues and personal freedoms, but still are managed by autocratic, family rule. The fourth model would be the democratic option. Supporters of this approach are on the defensive, in part because of the war in Iraq and the U.S. efforts to promote democracy that have backfired. Nevertheless, there are the beginnings of civil society and open thinking in countries like Kuwait.

The Arab world feels squeezed between governments that are committed to the status quo and Islamic forces that want to extend their powers. The middle has not been able to find a space for itself. The great question is whether the authoritarian states will become failed states, and whether or not the players within the Islamic movements can bring about changes to moderate the harsher model of Islamic government. The two outstanding problems for the Islamists concern the use of violence and the respect for diversity. The underlying challenge is whether or not governance in the Middle East should be based upon a constitution, or the Qur’an. No matter what model emerges, a number of fundamental issues underpin current crises in the region, including education, unemployment, discrimination, human rights, and good governance.

There was a great deal of discussion on the role of women, and the issue of veiling and the burkha. Some suggested that the burkha is not Islamic, it’s more tribal, and others felt the hijab is indeed a religious tenant. There is a diversity of opinion among women themselves as to whether or not covered dress is essential to their religion. There was concern that, for instance, Afghan women are losing their rights that had been won after the overthrow of the Taliban, as more and more of them seem to be resorting to fully-covered clothing. In contrast, the debate in Turkey about the veils is of a very different nature, where the effort of the country is to find a way of compromising on this sensitive matter.

In considering why the centrist-middle is so obviously missing in Middle East politics, the defining moment that led to its exclusion was the Islamic revival in Iran triggered in part by the 1953 coup followed by the 1979 revolution. For the Arabs it was Nasser’s crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and the execution of Sayyid Qutb. Islamic movements essentially filled the vacuum after the 1967 war, which was such a humiliation to the authoritarian Arabs and Arab nationalism.

Is it possible to have moderate Islamic governments? Yes, but we need to define what we mean by ‘moderation’. If the Islamists respect a constitution and accept that you can lose an election, one will be well on the way to a breakthrough. The Islamists must learn to respect diversity and the ‘give-and-take’ of politics. The fear is that the Islamists are one-dimensional; that one man, one vote, one time would become the norm. In this regard, there was consideration of whether the Muslim Brotherhood is part of the solution, or part of the problem. Some...
felt that the Middle East is ripe for change, and that the Muslim Brotherhood is capable of adaptation and moderation.

Concerning American efforts to bring about democracy in the region, Egypt is a good example of how difficult it is for the U.S. to influence change. Most liberals and supporters of democracy in the Arab world suffer because of the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict and blame many of the problems on the United States. Everyone uses this conflict for his own purposes. Nevertheless, engaging the Islamists is a necessary process in forwarding the American agenda. That said, there are clear gaps between democratic reality and practice. The United States wants to urge democracy on our enemies, but at the same time cozies up to dictators to fight the war on terrorism. This poses dilemmas for those who would otherwise be supportive of American objectives. One of the flaws of American policy has been the focus on the need for open elections in the Arab world. What has inevitably happened is that Islamists have won, but it is clear that in many cases they cannot govern. The situation in Gaza, where Hamas now controls the strings of power, has been the clearest example.

Referring to the progress made by small city-states, such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha, and whether their development model will have an impact on Saudi Arabia, it was suggested that King Abd’ullah is opening up Saudi Arabia, but the country has a much more serious terrorist problem than the smaller states. Nevertheless, the winds of change in Saudi Arabia are discernable.

The question of whether the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is essential before there can be real progress in the region was challenged by some, but it was pointed out that most Arab states have come a long way in their willingness to recognize Israel. Only religious extremists on both sides now benefit from the continuation of this conflict. The question of how much moderate Islamic clerics could help the effort to move towards the center was raised, and it was suggested that there is potential here. The capacity for change in the Middle East is amazing. Symbols of change go down very well in the Middle East, for instance, Sadat’s historic trip to Jerusalem. One must be careful not to lump all clerical moderates together. The Muslim Brotherhood has done well in some countries, but has lost elections in Jordan and Kuwait. It is very difficult to generalize about the entire region. All countries have their own ‘Dark Ages’. The problem facing the Arabs is they are hostage between tyrannical secular despotism and Islamic despotism. The United States has chosen to support secular despotism over Islamic despotism, but this does not go down well with the intelligentsia.

On the issue of U.S. policy initiatives, some felt that the role of women is a critical factor in modernizing the region. Thus investing in education for girls should be a major priority. It has not been, and the United States must do more to help and encourage investment in this sector. Women need to be treated equally. Again, the problem is that the United States has marred its reputation in the events that have followed 9/11, and its failure to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. That said, the complexities and diversities of Islam need to be better understood, and there needs to be more money for academic studies in the United States on the issue of Islam. We should prepare our citizens better for dealing with this critical issue.

The third day’s discussion was initiated by Justin Vaisse. He focused on three issues beyond those covered in his paper on Europe’s Muslims: Islamic identity, radicalization, and political culture. He suggested that Islam is not the key to understanding the world of terrorism. If you want to understand Islamic terrorism, don’t read the Qur’an. In this sense, suggestions of a dialogue of civilizations make no sense. The issues are too complicated to believe a dialogue can somehow eradicate the sources of conflict.

On the issue of radicalization, there are two approaches to examining entities such as al-Qaida. There is a so-called ‘vertical’ approach,
which establishes a hierarchical relationship leading from the Qur'an to radical ideology to al-Qaida. This approach argues that al-Qaida is an outgrowth of Islam, and the Middle East is the key to the core of the problems. It suggests that the ultimate goal of al-Qaida and other radicals is the establishment of a worldwide caliphate. The problems with this vertical approach are that most terrorists are not religious, and they don’t care about Western degeneration. Most radical converts to extremism did not do so because of religion or ideology. There are strict limits on the vertical approach.

The second approach, the ‘horizontal’ approach, looks at Islamic movements in the context of other violent groups, where the power of the narrative for fighting imperialism becomes one of the key factors. Al-Qaida is, in its own way, no different from the Red Brigade or the supporters of Che Guevara nurturing revolution in Latin America. There are important links between Islamic radicals and petty criminals, drug lords, and terrorism. The suicidal violence associated with al-Qaida is, again, nothing unique to Islam. The so-called ‘Columbine syndrome’, a mixture of solitude, lack of social life, and the search for fame, leads people to commit such crimes. We tend to idealize al-Qaida too much. This is important for policy making, because if the horizontal explanations have merit, one has to forget about reforming Islam, instead focus on the failures and stress the tensions amongst radicals. Concerning political culture, one can learn from the experience of Europe, where the separation of church and state only came after years of religious wars and great differences within the great European societies themselves, as indeed is the case today, if one considers the different treatment Muslims receive in each European country.

In the discussion, there were questions as to how important religion is in the context of Islamic suicide attacks. Some felt it was central; others felt that it was part of the problem but that many suicide attacks are not religiously motivated. Another perspective suggested not so much whether the vertical or horizontal approach is correct, but that Islamic terrorists can and do manipulate religion for their own purposes, and this is what we have to pay attention to. Some felt that it is wrong to underplay the religious component, but one needs to distinguish between three religious groups: officials, scholars, and activists. Among the activists, there are the non-violent advocates and the violent advocates. The problem is the non-violent supporters are not active enough. One needs to distinguish between these factors before the West can successfully engage with the Islamic world. But the efforts to date by the United States to promote moderate Islam have been a kiss of death to many non-violent Islamic activists who want better relations with the West.

There was discussion of the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe. Although its manifestation is different in various European countries due to history, French anti-Semitism has attracted the most attention, primarily because of the large number of Jews and Muslims in France. The strained relations deteriorated after the fighting in the West Bank in 2002 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Anti-Semitism by France’s Muslims is not the same as their overall radicalism and anger. Many are upset by the reality of life in France which bears little resemblance to the ideology of cultural assimilation.

Another theme was the extent to which anti-Americanism, particularly that advanced by al-Qaida is because of U.S. hegemony. Some argued that decreasing the American footprint will reduce the intensity of al-Qaida as a problem. Others felt that this underestimated the ideology and religious fervor of al-Qaida and radical movements. One participant strongly challenged the idea that Islam is not a key factor in the radicalism. In the case of Central Asia, Islam is key to understanding the frustrations and anger of the Islamic movements. After considerable discussion, there were two distinct views that emerged. Those who tended to agree with the argument that Islamic violence is linked to other factors, sociological as well as historical, to reinforce the so-called hor-
izontal arguments, and those who strongly believe that the key to understanding Islamic radicalism is to understand Islam, and the fact that many of the radicals believe they are doing the work of God.

When it comes to dealing with radicalism, and the European experience, France has been quite successful in ending hae speech in the mosques due to tough surveillance. This has now spread to the United Kingdom. It was noted that Muslims in the United States are more integrated than is the case of Europe. It isn’t so much that they care about the American dream; what they care about is the American economy and have done quite well in the U.S.

At a lunchtime address, Lakhdar Brahimi, former Algerian foreign minister and special U.N. representative to Afghanistan, discussed the current situation in Afghanistan. His basic argument was that because the war against the Taliban in 2001 had been so successful and ended so quickly, the new interim Afghan government established at the Bonn conference did not represent elements of the Taliban and the Pashtun, who are the largest group in Afghanistan. There was no attempt to reach out to the moderate Taliban at the time, but the reality was that in December 2001 the Taliban had not been defeated. In retrospect, the decision to deploy the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) only to Kabul was wrong. It should have been expanded, and 20,000 troops should have been sent to other main cities. In 2003, Iraq took up all the energy and we ignored Pakistan and its close relations with the Taliban. U.S. presence in Afghanistan is presently dysfunctional. Different allied groups are fighting different wars; there is no plan for solving the problem. What is needed is for the U.S. and its allies to sit together and reassess the situation. Discussions must include Pakistan, India, and Iran. Most critical, the United States must decide how to handle the Pakistani government. The reality is the Afghan government has performed badly, and questions about Karzai’s future have to be raised. Too much money from the U.S. and the U.N. goes to con-

At an evening session, Dalia Mogahed, described and summarized a major study that Gallup has undertaken on Islamic attitudes. Having outlined the methodology that was used in setting up the worldwide study, she pointed out that the opinions of the majority of Muslims are complicated and, in many cases, mirror-imaged those of populations in the West. It is highly misleading to categorize a billion people with simplistic slogans or attitudes. There was some discussion of the relevance of the study; certainly, it is unique in its outreach and broad conclusions suggest that the vast majority of Muslims are non-violent and disapprove of the sorts of activities conducted by al-Qaida and other terrorists, particularly directed against civilian populations. It is particularly important to note that according to the data there is no correlation between the level of religiosity of Islamic groups and the sympathy for terrorism.

On the last day, Robin Bush outlined the role of Islamic parties in Southeast Asia. This is an important locus of Muslims who are very diversified. Many lessons can be learned from the south Asian experience. The evidence suggests that when Islamists are marginalized, they become radical, and when they are embraced they become less radical. In the case of Indonesia, Islamists were forcibly repressed under former President Sukarno. A number of Islamic moderates eventually emerged. Then came 9/11 and the global war on terrorism and Iraq. The effect served to radicalize Islamic movements. Before the events, no one took them seriously, but then rampant anti-Americanism took off. The initial anti-
Americanism in Indonesia was spurred in part by the blanket restrictions placed on Muslims worldwide by the United States government. This insulted and infuriated many Indonesians, who considered themselves close friends of the United States. This was then followed by the Bali bombings and other terrorist attacks within Indonesia. Once the Indonesians themselves began to experience terrorism, they became much more cooperative with the United States in confronting the problem. U.S. aid to Indonesia following the tsunami of December 2004 also helped to improve relations.

Much of the discussion focused on what U.S. policies were best suited for helping to contain radicalism within the Muslim communities of Southeast Asia. U.S. efforts to promote democracy have been unsuccessful for a number of reasons including historical insensitivity, high rhetoric and little action and too much focus on national as distinct from local political actors and a tendency to confuse democracy promotion with elections. The United States can still engage constructively with the countries of Southeast Asia, but the important focus should be on institution building rather than attempts to reform political parties. And here, one must distinguish between Islamic parties, who work with secular colleagues and are pluralist, and Islamist parties who seek to incorporate Islam into their political framework with the eventual imposition of the sharia law.
The Status of al Qaeda: The Organization Today and the Outlook Over the Next Five Years

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Al Qaeda Today

It is conventional wisdom that al Qaeda the organization has been largely destroyed and an ideological movement inspired by al Qaeda has replaced it, spawning a new generation of “homegrown” or “self-starting” terrorists that have implemented attacks such as the one in Madrid in 2004 that killed 191 people.

The rapid spread of the al Qaeda ideological virus in the past several years should be cause for considerable concern, but it would be quite wrong to conclude that therefore the central al Qaeda organization is no longer a threat. Such a view underestimates the resiliency of al Qaeda, which is a criminal organization, animated by strong ideological/religious beliefs, which also draws strength from several local insurgencies such as those along the Afghan-Pakistan border, in Kashmir and in Iraq. Because of these ideological/religious beliefs and its ties to vibrant insurgencies, al Qaeda is able to withstand multiple blows to its leadership and infrastructure of the kind that would put an ordinary criminal organization, such as a Mafia crime family, out of business.

In fact, more than at any time since September 11, Osama bin Laden’s deadly organization is back in business.

Evidence for the resiliency of the al Qaeda organization

1. The London attacks of July 2005, and al Qaeda’s alarming reach into the United Kingdom

The London bombings on July 7, 2005 were a classic al Qaeda plot. A British government report published in 2006 explains that the ring-leader, Mohammed Siddique Khan, visited Afghanistan in the late 1990s and Pakistan on two occasions in 2003 and 2004, spending a total of several months in the country. The report goes on to note that Khan “had some contact with al Qaida figures” in Pakistan, and is “believed to have had some relevant training in a remote part of Pakistan, close to the Afghan border” during his two-week visit in 2003. According to the report, Khan was also in “suspicious” contact with individuals in Pakistan in the four months immediately before he led the London attacks.

Further, Khan appeared on a videotape that aired on Al Jazeera television network two months after the attacks. On that tape Khan says, “I’m going to talk to you in a language that you understand. Our words are dead until we give them life with our blood.” He goes on to describe Osama bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri as “today’s heroes.” Khan’s statements
were made on a videotape that bore the distinctive logo of As Sahab, “The Clouds,” which is the television production arm of al Qaeda. Khan’s appearance on the As Sahab videotape shows that he met with members of al Qaeda’s media team who are based on the Afghan-Pakistan border. In 2006 a similar videotape of another one of the London suicide bombers appeared also made by As Sahab, further evidence of al Qaeda’s role in the bombings.

The grim lesson of the London attack is that al Qaeda was able to conduct simultaneous bombings in a major European capital thousands of miles from its base on the Afghan-Pakistan border. While far from a 9/11-style attack, the London bombings showed the kind of planning and ability to hit targets far from its home base seen in pre-9/11 al Qaeda attacks such as the one mounted on the USS Cole in Yemen in 2000. Al Qaeda has therefore recovered sufficient strength that it can now undertake multiple, successful bombings aimed at targets in the West.

Similarly, the plot that was foiled in the U.K. in August 2006 to bring down half a dozen American airliners with liquid explosives, an event that would have rivaled 9/11 in magnitude had it succeeded, was directed by al Qaeda from Pakistan, according to the January 2007 testimony of Lt. General Michael Maples, head of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency.

On November 5, 2007, Jonathan Evans, the head of Britain’s domestic intelligence service MI5, said there were 2,000 individuals in the U.K. that the British government believed to be a threat to security. Evans noted that the “terrorist attacks we have seen against the U.K. are not simply random plots by disparate and fragmented groups. The majority of these attacks, successful or otherwise, have taken place because al Qaeda has a clear determination to mount terrorist attacks against the United Kingdom….Over the last five years much of the command, control and inspiration for attack planning in the U.K. have derived from al Qaeda’s remaining core leadership in the tribal areas of Pakistan.”

2. The vitality of al Qaeda’s propaganda division, As Sahab

Bin Laden has observed that 90% of his battle is conducted in the media. Al Qaeda understands that what the Pentagon calls IO (Information Operations) are key to its successes. As Sahab’s first major production debuted on the internet in the summer of 2001 signaling a major anti-American attack was in the works. Since then, As Sahab has continued to release key statements from al Qaeda’s leaders and has significantly increased its output in the last year or so. In 2007 As Sahab released more audio and videotapes than any year in its six year history; at least eighty. These tapes are increasingly sophisticated productions with subtitles in languages such as English, animation effects and studio settings. As Sahab’s increasingly sophisticated and regular output is evidence that al Qaeda has recovered to a degree that it is capable of managing a relatively advanced propaganda operation. That operation is unlikely to have a fixed studio location, but it does include a number of cameramen as well as editors using editing programs such as Final Cut Pro on laptops.

3. The continuing influence of bin Laden and Zawahiri

Bin Laden may no longer be calling people on a satellite phone to order attacks, but he remains in broad ideological and strategic control of al Qaeda around the world. An indicator of this is that in 2004, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the then-leader of foreign fighters in Iraq renamed his organization “Al Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers” and publicly swore bayat, a religiously binding oath of allegiance, to bin Laden.

Moreover, the dozens of video and audio tapes that bin Laden and Zawahiri have released since 9/11 have reached hundreds of millions of people worldwide through television, newspapers and the internet, making them among the most widely distributed political statements in history. Those tapes have not only had the effect of instructing al Qaeda’s fol-
lowers to kill Americans, Westerners and Jews, but some tapes have also carried specific instructions that militant cells have acted upon. For instance, on October 19, 2003 bin Laden called for action against Spain because of its troop presence in Iraq, the first time that al Qaeda’s leader had singled out the country. Six months later, terrorists killed 191 commuters in Madrid. And in the spring of 2004, bin Laden offered a three-month truce to European countries willing to pull out of the coalition in Iraq. Almost exactly a year after his truce offer expired, an al Qaeda-directed cell carried out bombings on London’s public transportation system that killed 52 commuters. In December 2004, bin Laden called for attacks on Saudi oil facilities and in February 2006, al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia attacked the Abqaiq facility, arguably the most important oil production facility in the world. (That attack was a failure.)

4. Al Qaeda’s influence in Iraq

For the moment, Al Qaeda in Iraq is a wounded organization. The number of foreign fighters coming in to Iraq has declined from 120 a month in 2007 to less than 40 today. According to the U.S. military, foreign fighters are now trying to leave the country.

However, future withdrawals of U.S. troops from Iraq will obviously help al Qaeda’s ability to operate in the country. Al Qaeda also has a ‘paper tiger’ narrative about the United States based on American pullouts from Vietnam during the 1970s, Lebanon in the ’80s and Somalia in the ’90s. American draw downs from Iraq will be seen as confirming this narrative.

5. Al Qaeda continues to attract other militant groups to its standard

In addition to al Qaeda in Iraq stating on several occasions over the past three years that it takes overall direction from al Qaeda central, in September 2006 the Algerian Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) announced that it was putting itself under the al Qaeda umbrella. GSPC is considered the most significant terrorist movement in Algeria. Abu Musab Abdul Wadud, the leader of the GSPC explained that “the organization of al-Qaeda of Jihad is the only organization qualified to gather together the mujahideen.”

6. The rapidly deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan over the past year is, at least in part, the responsibility of al Qaeda

The use of suicide attacks, improvised explosive devices and the beheadings of hostages—all techniques that al Qaeda perfected in Iraq—are methods that the Taliban has increasingly adopted in Afghanistan, making much of the south of the country a no-go area. Hekmat Karzai, an Afghan terrorism researcher points out suicide bombings were virtually unknown in Afghanistan until 2005 when there were 21 such attacks. U.S. sources say there were 139 suicide attacks in 2006.

Mullah Dadullah, a key Taliban commander gave two interviews to Al Jazeera in 2006 before he was killed, in which he made some illuminating observations about the Taliban’s links to al Qaeda. Dadullah said, “We have close ties. Our cooperation is ideal,” adding that Osama bin Laden is issuing orders to the Taliban. Indeed, a senior U.S. military intelligence official says that “trying to separate Taliban and al Qaeda in Pakistan serves no purpose. It’s like picking gray hairs out of your head.” Dadullah also noted that “we have ‘give and take’ relations with the mujahideen in Iraq.”

7. Pakistan

To the extent that al Qaeda has a new base, it is in Pakistan. From there bin Laden and Zawahiri have released a stream of audio and videotapes. Evidence of al Qaeda’s growing strength in Pakistan can also be seen in the advice and personnel it is offering the Taliban in its campaign of suicide attacks in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda today clandestinely operates small training camps in Pakistan, “People want to see barracks. [In fact] the camps use dry riverbeds for shooting and are
housed in compounds for 20 people where they are taught calisthenics and bomb making” says a senior U.S. military intelligence official.

The fact that Pakistan is the new training ground for al Qaeda recruits indicates that the organization will continue to be a significant threat. Terrorist plots have a much higher degree of success if some of the cell’s members have received training in bomb making and operational doctrine in person. For example, two of the London July 7, 2005 suicide bombers received al Qaeda training in Pakistan.

**The future of al Qaeda over the next five years**

1. **The leadership**

   The single biggest variable about the future of al Qaeda is what happens to bin Laden. For six years he has already survived the most intense manhunt in history. It would be wishful thinking to believe that he won’t survive another five years. However, if he were to be captured or killed that would have a devastating effect on al Qaeda.

   On several occasions bin Laden has said that he’s prepared to die in his holy war—statements that should be taken at face value. In the short-term, bin Laden’s death would likely trigger violent anti-American attacks around the globe, while in the medium-term, his death would deal a serious blow to al Qaeda as bin Laden’s charisma and organizational skills have played a critical role in its success. However, bin Laden does have eleven sons, some of whom might choose to go into their father’s line of work.

   Should bin Laden be captured or killed, that would likely trigger a succession battle within al Qaeda. While Zawahiri is technically bin Laden’s successor, he is not regarded as a natural leader. Indeed, even among the Egyptians within al Qaeda, Zawahiri is seen as a divisive force. The loss of bin Laden would likely challenge the unity of the organization, a unity that al Qaeda’s internal documents indicate has often been fragile.

2. **Haven on the Afghan-Pakistan border, and al Qaeda’s ideology and tactics increasingly being adopted by the Taliban**

   The Pakistani military and its intelligence agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) have proven either unwilling or incapable or both of destroying al Qaeda and its Taliban allies in their country.

   Unless the Pakistani government takes real action, safe havens that the Taliban and al Qaeda enjoy in Pakistan are unlikely to be extinguished unless there is a significant attack in the U.S. or U.K. that is traceable to the tribal areas, and subsequent intense political pressure from those countries results in the measures necessary to destroy the militant organizations and movements in Pakistan.

   This has unfortunate implications for countries with large Pakistani diaspora populations such as the United Kingdom, whose citizens make 400,000 visits to Pakistan each year. A tiny minority of those visitors end up training with terrorist groups in Pakistan including al Qaeda. That problem is less pronounced in North America and Europe where Pakistanis make up a relatively small proportion of the Muslim population, but already in Spain and France, terrorism cases involving Pakistani immigrants are emerging.

   In addition, the Taliban on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan border are increasingly identified as the true guardian of Pashtun rights, but at the same time they have also increasingly adopted both al Qaeda tactics and ideology. As the Taliban and al Qaeda merge both tactically and ideologically, this could give al Qaeda a political constituency of sorts. This is worrisome as the Pashtun tribal grouping—the largest such grouping in the world—numbers some 40 million people on both sides of the border.

   Further, should Afghanistan slide into chaos—at this moment a real possibility—that would also benefit al Qaeda as it would increase the number of safe havens along the border regions.
3. The influence of European militants in al Qaeda

The Islamist terrorist threat to the United States today largely emanates from Europe, not from domestic sleeper cells or—as is popularly imagined—the graduates of Middle Eastern madrassas who can do little more than read the Koran. Omar Sheikh, for instance, the kidnapper of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, is a British citizen of Pakistani descent who studied at the academically rigorous London School of Economics. The 9/11 pilots became more militant while they were students in Hamburg. Indeed, Robert Leiken of the Nixon Center has found that of 373 Islamist terrorists arrested or killed in Europe and the United States from 1993 through 2004 an astonishing 41 percent were Western nationals, who were either naturalized or second generation Europeans or converts to Islam. Leiken found more terrorists who were French than the combined totals of Pakistani and Yemeni terrorists!

Future terrorist attacks that will be damaging to American national security are therefore likely to have a European connection. Citizens of the European Union, who adopt al Qaeda’s ideology, can both easily move around Europe and also have easy entry into the United States because of the Visa Waiver Program that exists with European countries.

The most likely perpetrators of another major terrorist attack on American soil come from an unexpected quarter: citizens of the United States’ closest ally. Militant British citizens of Pakistani descent are the most significant terrorist threat facing the United States. Most of those arrested in the 2006 plot to bring down American airliners over the Atlantic, for instance, were young British Pakistanis.

4. Tactics and targeting al Qaeda will use in the future

a. Attacking Western economic targets, particularly the oil industry

Since the 9/11 attacks, al Qaeda and its affiliated groups have increasingly attacked economic and business targets. The shift in tactics is in part a response to the fact that the traditional pre-9/11 targets, such as American embassies, war ships, and military bases, are now better defended, while so-called ‘soft’ economic targets are both ubiquitous and easier to hit.

Al Qaeda and its affiliated terrorist groups are also increasingly targeting companies that have distinctive Western brand names. In 2003, suicide attackers bombed the Marriott hotel in Jakarta. The same year in Karachi, a string of small explosions at eighteen Shell stations wounded four; while in 2002 a group of a dozen French defense contractors were killed as they left a Sheraton hotel, which was heavily damaged. In October 2004 in Taba, Egyptian jihadists attacked a Hilton hotel. In Amman, Jordan in November 2005, Al Qaeda in Iraq attacked three American-owned hotels—the Grand Hyatt, Radisson and Days Inn—killing 60 people. Around the same time a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant was attacked in Karachi killing three.

Al Qaeda attacks on oil facilities accelerated sharply beginning in 2004. Suicide bombers struck Iraq’s principal oil terminal in Basra on April 21, 2004. In Yanbu, Saudi Arabia, al Qaeda’s Saudi Arabia affiliate attacked the offices of ABB Lummus Global, a contractor for Exxon/Mobil, on May 1, 2004 killing six Westerners. As noted above, in February 2006, al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia unsuccessfully attacked the Abqaiq facility, perhaps the most important oil production facility in the world. Al Qaeda will continue its attacks on oil installations, pipelines, and oil workers for the foreseeable future in both Saudi Arabia and Iraq, the two countries that happen to sit on the largest oil reserves in the world.

b. Attacking Israeli/Jewish targets

Attacking Jewish and Israeli targets is an al Qaeda strategy that has only emerged strongly post-9/11. Despite bin Laden’s declaration in February 1998 that he was creating the “World Islamic Front against the Crusaders and the Jews,” al Qaeda only started attacking Israeli or Jewish targets in early 2002. Since then, al
Qaeda and its affiliated groups have directed an intense campaign against Israeli and Jewish targets, killing journalist Daniel Pearl in Karachi, bombing synagogues in Tunisia and Turkey, and attacking an Israeli-owned hotel in Mombasa, Kenya, which killed thirteen. At the same time as the attack on the Kenyan hotel, al Qaeda also tried to bring down an Israeli passenger jet with rocket propelled grenades, an attempt that was unsuccessful. In the future, al Qaeda will likely intensify its campaign of attacking Jewish and Israeli targets.

5. Tactics that al Qaeda is likely to deploy in the next five years that it has hitherto not used successfully

There are two tactics that al Qaeda might successfully deploy in the next five years that for differing reasons would have significant detrimental effects on American interests. Both tactics are well within the capabilities of the organization so they do not represent Chicken Little scenarios (such as the use of nuclear devices).

The first tactic is the use of RPGs (Rocket Propelled Grenades) or SAMs (Surface to Air Missiles) to bring down a commercial jetliner. As mentioned above, al Qaeda already attempted such an attack against an Israeli passenger jet in Kenya in 2002. That attempt almost succeeded. A successful effort by al Qaeda to bring down a commercial passenger jet anywhere in the world would have a devastating effect on both global aviation and tourism.

The second tactic would be the deployment of a radiological bomb attack, most likely in a European city. Such an attack would have a much greater ability to terrorize than the small-scale chemical and biological attacks that terrorists have mounted in the past, as it would seem to most observers that the terrorists had “gone nuclear” even though, of course, a radiological bomb is nothing like a nuclear device.

6. Al Qaeda’s strategy over the next five years

As al Qaeda’s number two, Ayman al Zawahiri, explained shortly after 9/11 in his autobiographical Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner, the most important strategic goal of al Qaeda is to seize control of a state, or part of a state, somewhere in the Muslim world. He writes, “Confronting the enemies of Islam, and launching jihad against them require a Muslim authority, established on a Muslim land that raises the banner of jihad and rallies the Muslims around it. Without achieving this goal our actions will mean nothing.” Such a jihadist state would then become a launching pad for attacks on the American homeland. We have seen al Qaeda do this once before in Afghanistan. Now the goal is to establish a jihadist mini-state in Iraq, in the heart of the Middle East, rather than on the periphery of the Muslim world as al Qaeda was able to do under the Taliban. This will be al Qaeda’s main strategic goal for the next few years.

Another key goal will be to maintain their base on the Afghan-Pakistan border. Al Qaeda seeks a safe haven that replicates some of the features of its Afghan haven before the fall of the Taliban. The tribal areas along Pakistan’s western border are proving a congenial place for al Qaeda to regroup.

Al Qaeda’s aim in the next five years will also be to stay relevant and to stay in the news. The organization will be opportunistic in spinning hot-button issues for Muslims around the world for their purposes, as they did during the Danish cartoon controversy and the month-long conflict in Lebanon in 2006.

It is possible that al Qaeda may also seek to aim more attacks at Christians in the coming years. Attacks on the Pope both verbal and literal should be expected.

The situation in Darfur is also likely to be a flashpoint. Al Qaeda seems to view western humanitarian interventions in Darfur in the
same way as it viewed the humanitarian mission in Somalia in the early ’90s—as a western attempt to colonize Muslim lands. Al Qaeda fighters are likely to become embroiled in the Darfur conflict in the next few years.

7. Will al Qaeda (rather than “homegrown” terrorists) be able to attack the United States itself in the next five years?

In my view it is a low-level probability that al Qaeda will be able to attack the U.S. in the next five years.

In the past, when al Qaeda terrorists have tried or succeeded to launch attacks in the United States they have done so only after arriving from somewhere else. Ahmed Ressam for instance, who lived in Canada before he tried to blow up Los Angeles International airport in December 1999, was an Algerian who had trained with al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Similarly, the nineteen 9/11 hijackers hailed from countries around the Middle East. Ramzi Yousef, the mastermind of the first World Trade Center attack in 1993 that killed six, was a Pakistani who had also trained in an al Qaeda camp. None of these attackers relied on al Qaeda “sleeper cells” in the U.S. and there is no evidence that such cells exist today. Moreover, the U.S. is a much harder target than it was before 9/11, and the ability of an al Qaeda terrorist to enter the country and mount a successful operation has been greatly diminished by U.S. government actions, the heightened awareness of the American public, and the weaker state of al Qaeda itself. This is not, however, to imply that American homegrown terrorists inspired by al Qaeda might not carry out a small-bore terror attack inside the United States in the next five years.

Of course, al Qaeda itself remains quite capable of attacking a wide range of American economic interests overseas, killing U.S. soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, and targeting U.S. diplomatic facilities in Asia, the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East.

8. Al Qaeda’s long-term strategic weaknesses and the extent to which they may weaken the group over the next five years

a. Al Qaeda keeps killing Muslims civilians

This is a double whammy for al Qaeda as the Koran forbids killing civilians and fellow Muslims. Al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia lost a great deal of support after its campaign of attacks in 2003 that killed mostly Saudis. Ten percent of Saudis have a favorable view of the al Qaeda terrorist network, according to a survey released in December 2007 by Terror Free Tomorrow, an international public opinion research group based in Washington. Similarly, in Indonesia where Jemaah Islamiyah, the al Qaeda affiliate, has killed mostly Indonesians in its attacks over the past four years the militants have lost any vestiges of support they once enjoyed. Popular revulsion also followed al Qaeda in Iraq’s 2005 attacks against the three American-owned hotels in Amman, Jordan that killed mostly Jordanians.

b. Al Qaeda has not created a genuine mass political movement

While bin Laden enjoys personal popularity in much of the Muslim world that does not translate into mass support for al Qaeda in the manner that Hezbollah enjoys such support in Lebanon. That is not surprising—there are no al Qaeda social welfare services, schools, hospitals or clinics. Even al Qaeda’s leaders are aware of the problem of their lack of mass support. In a 2005 letter from Zawahiri to Zarqawi, al Qaeda’s number two urged the terrorist leader in Iraq to prepare for the U.S. withdrawal from the country by not making the same mistakes as the Taliban, who had alienated the masses in Afghanistan.

c. Al Qaeda’s leaders have constantly expanded their list of enemies

Al Qaeda has said it is opposed to all Middle Eastern regimes; Muslims who don’t share their views; the Shia; most Western countries; Jews and Christians; the governments of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Russia; most news organizations; the United Nations; and interna-
It's very hard to think of a category of person, institution, or government that al Qaeda does not oppose. Making a world of enemies is never a winning strategy.

d. **Al Qaeda has no positive vision**

We know what bin Laden is against, but what is he really for? If you asked him he would say the restoration of the caliphate. In practice that means Taliban-style theocracies stretching from Indonesia to Morocco. A silent majority of Muslims don’t want that. An interesting poll in Saudi Arabia in 2003 gets to this. In that poll 49% of Saudis admired bin Laden, while only 5% wanted to live in a bin Laden-run state. Many Muslims admire bin Laden because he “stood up” to the West. That doesn’t mean they want to live in bin Laden’s Islamist utopia. Sudan under Turabi, Afghanistan under the Taliban, and Iran under the ayatollahs don’t look very attractive to most Muslims.

The four strategic weaknesses of al Qaeda I have just considered have already led to declining support both for bin Laden and for terrorist attacks on civilians in a number of Muslim countries. However, although these long-term tragic weaknesses will damage al Qaeda over time, they are unlikely to have a significant impact on the group over the next five years because al Qaeda is drawing energy, support and new recruits from insurgencies in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan—conflicts that are likely to go on for longer than five years. In an authoritative study of 91 insurgencies in the past century, Seth Jones of the Rand organization found that it takes 14 years for the government to win against the insurgency, and 11 years for the insurgents to win against the government. Either way, we are in for protracted conflicts in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Those conflicts will energize and fuel al Qaeda over the next five years.
Religion and Politics in the Arab World: Dilemmas and Challenges

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It is a challenge in 2008 to belong to a generation that formed its basic views of the world during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Growing up in Kuwait, Beirut, and then coming to the United States to study at the age of 18 in 1971 has, naturally, affected the way I have come to view the world. The premise of my generation was simple: Old ways must be seen with new eyes; religion, tradition, and habit are not the only frameworks for examining the world. I myself was and still am the product of secularism, ranging from nationalism to Marxism to liberal democracy. Yet I am a product of religious values incorporated in my society and family. Religion was never in my understanding a formula to be applied but a set of moral values that guides our understanding of fairness, justice, respect and equality between human beings.

The 1950s and 1960s were marked by youthful rebellion against convention and the past. In the Arab context, this movement manifested itself in coups by young Arab officers, among them Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1952, the Lebanese students who went to the streets in 1969, and a new generation of supporters and activists in the Palestinian movement in the mid and late 1960s. This state of affairs led Sadiq Jalal al-Azim, a young Arab scholar at the American University of Beirut, to write his unusual and critical thesis of religious thought in 1969.

This era also produced troubling times in the world—including the reign of the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia, the continuity of Stalinism, the Cultural Revolution in China under Mao—as well as xenophobic secular nationalism elsewhere. Arab nationalism dominated the Middle East during this period before beginning its dramatic retreat after the June 1967 War.

The violence and terrorism of the 1960s was more secular than that of recent years and today. Its practitioners had immediate reasons for its use, such as a hijacking to obtain the release of prisoners or to open political channels. The objective often was not the wanton spilling of blood. In fact, a number of Palestinian and Arab hijackers deliberately chose to avoid blood baths, instead focusing on demands that required political engagement of some sort.

In the 1960s and into the 1970s in the Middle East, religion was limited primarily to the mosque; it played only a limited role in public life. More than any group in society, it was older men who went to the mosques for prayers and socialization. In most of the Arab world, religiosity was in decline, particularly among the young. Images of public gatherings in the Arab world from the 1950s through the 1970s reveal only a rare veiled or covered woman. Middle Easterners and Moslems of the period were forward looking in their worldview and secular.

Arabs of the 1960s fell principally into two camps: supporters of the traditional monarchies who sided with the West during the Cold War and supporters of a semi-revolutionary mil-
tant Arab nationalism led by Nasser who advocated a socialist view of the world. The Arab nationalists threatened the monarchies and were closer to the Soviet Union than were the traditionalists. The military coups of this and the preceding decade in Egypt, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen had overthrown monarchies. Those royal lines that remained in power sought to contain Nasser and found in Islam an identity to counter the Nasserist secular vision.

The monarchies’ unease and Israel’s capture of East Jerusalem in 1967 provided the impetus for Saudi Arabia’s King Faysal to work with other leaders in establishing the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which is headquartered in Saudi Arabia; the OIC in part was intended, among Arab leaders, as a counterweight to the Arab League, headquartered in Cairo. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states and monarchies in the region hosted members of the Muslim Brotherhood who faced imprisonment elsewhere, including Egypt, where the organization was banned. The Muslim Brothers, founded in Egypt in 1927 and advocating a highly politicized reinterpretation of Islam, benefited from growing support and legitimacy in Gulf societies. In Saudi Arabia, the expression of the Muslim Brothers found a sympathetic ear in the strict Saudi interpretation of Islam.

The Arabs’ shockingly swift and decisive defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war struck a blow to the heart of Arab nationalism, leading many to question the legitimacy and efficacy of its leaders. This loss in an area with a modern history lacking strong traditions in civil society, democratic thinking, and centrist ideas opened the door for politicized religion to fill the void left by the retreat of secular Arab nationalism.

**Religious Revival: The 1970s and Beyond**

In the late 1970s, Islam returned with a sense of vengeance against all after being marginalized by the -isms: socialism, Nasserism, communism, Baathism, Arab nationalism, and even Zionism. As had occurred in the past with other movements centered around religion, this one brought with it a culture of absolutism. Urbanization and other socioeconomic developments also contributed in the 1980s and 1990s to opening the way for the steady rise of religious revival across the Arab world.

The Islamist movement in the Arab world had a secular dimension: It thrived on such sociological elements as classes in distress and feelings of powerlessness among cultures in the midst of changing socioeconomic structures. It provided a platform for communities seeking political participation, security, and in some cases resistance to occupation without necessarily being democratic in nature. Similar religious expression was simultaneously taking root in communities in Eastern Europe gearing up to face down communist rule. In general, religious activism has in the past provided a foundation or solace for people living in poverty or otherwise anxious times. It should come as no surprise that religion-based moral values returned to center stage in the wake of what appeared to be secularist indifference to morality and the failure of class-based ideologies claiming to advance the betterment of the weak.

Supporting Islamic movements, organizations, and leaders evolved as well as a means for fearful rulers to counter socialist and nationalist or leftist and communist influence or ascendance in their countries. This dynamic stood at the center of the financial and military assistance given to the Islamic resistance in Afghanistan by Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, along with the United States, in the 1980s following the 1979 Soviet invasion. This support helped nurture a militant and extreme version of Islam that gave rise to the Taliban and to Osama Bin Laden and the al-Qaida network.

The 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran set the tone and paved the path for religious revival in the Middle East. The revolution transformed Iran into a theocracy governed by a class of clergy who interpreted and applied Islam to the political as well as social realms. The government imposed dress codes for men and women, banned alcohol, segregated the sexes wherever
When governments came under pressure to open their political systems to allow broader participation, some religious groups dismissed electoral politics as a Western practice. After recognizing the opportunity elections had to offer, they organized to contest them, running for legislative seats where they could. Having secured seats, they proceeded to cast parliamentary votes against women’s rights, lobbied successfully for more religious education in schools, advocated Islamic punishment for criminals, and in general sought to pass measures in line with their religion-tinted view of society. The religious revivalists’ attacks on curricula undermined nationalist teachings in the classroom and respect for local nationalisms. Their fundamentalist and puritanical interpretations of sharia took or threatened to take Arab and Islamic societies back centuries.

At the same time, religious groups in Parliaments focused on corruption and transparency in government, governance, and accountability. They also focused on limiting the impact of the internet and globalization on Islamic values. They considered this to be part of the Islamic agenda.

Afghanistan and Sudan followed Iran in implementing sharia. Several Arab societies, including Algeria, faced civil strife and war over the role of religion in the political arena. In Kuwait, attempts at implementing sharia took place through the modification of existing laws. On the other hand, in Saudi Arabia, religious resurgence bred a more rigid form of the state’s imposition of sharia; the religionists in the kingdom were prepared for and eventually entered into battle with the government. Most regimes confronted by religionist political maneuvering have thus far managed nonetheless to protect their legitimacy and grip on power.

The logic of the religionists, in this case Islamists, was simple: Arab secular society could only find its way out of subjugation to western powers and economic distress by implementing God’s law. Islam is the answer to Islamic socioeconomic problems. Accepting and obeying the sharia held the key to success and victory.
against internal and external enemies. Here two schools of thought held sway.

The majority grouping believed that reaching its objective could be accomplished using political means; it therefore rejected violence without respect for diversity. Its supporters saw elections and democracy as a means to the end—Islamization of the state and society. In Kuwait, members of the parliamentary Islamist bloc did not argue for cutting off the hands of thieves; instead they focused mainly on segregating men and women in education and eliminating expressions of joy and celebration in the country found in many Arab countries such as UAE, Lebanon, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and Egypt. In 2008 they established a committee to address negative and foreign influences in the country. First on the committee’s agenda was to declare the gay and lesbian community an external influence. Committee members (according to other members of parliament and liberal writers in Kuwait) hope to bring about the passage of legislation to create religious police to monitor behavior. In the meantime, Kuwait is in dire need to update and develop its education, privatization, development, public health, and so on. These issues are of little or no importance to MPs from the Islamic bloc.

This school in Islam, known as the mainstream of the politicized Islamic movement, has accepted peaceful means to further its goal as demonstrated in Kuwait, Jordan and other countries in the region. Yet by insisting on segregating schools or passing legislation to make sharia the only source of legislation, and limiting it’s thinking to the application of sharia, it is undermining diversity and personal freedoms in society. The monolithic social agenda of the Islamist movement must be challenged by civil society and by the state in order to create an evolution in its ranks. The movement does not yet see personal freedoms and diversity of lifestyles as basic to civic culture and development. They also do not view politics, the state, and education as separate entities from their interpretation of Islam.

The other Islamist school, the minority, is represented by al-Qaida and similar groups. They have no qualms about employing violence to bring about the immediate application of sharia. These armed groups have a heightened sense of urgency compared to those willing to follow a purely political path. The Puritanism of these groups is of the highest order; their understanding of sharia is strict to the point of suspecting the Muslim Brothers and similar groups of selling out. Its adherents are willing to kill others, whom they have dehumanized, and sacrifice their own lives in pursuit of their vision.

Struggle Within, Struggle Without

The trail of religious violence across the Arab world cannot be missed. Religious zealots have committed almost innumerable acts of violence against the state (for example, assassinating Egyptian president Anwar Sadat) and society (for example, bombing resorts, attacking religious minorities, tourists, and local populations). The violence and terrorism of religious extremists has become a fact of life in the Middle East and has reached out to touch other parts of the world.

In recent years, various aspects of the secular state have been undermined in the region. The net result has been the empowerment of religion and an added sense of renewed strength among the religious right. Rising and ongoing conflict between government and mosque compromises the integrity of the state. Only a minority of zealots is fighting this war, but the net result is their slow empowerment, as the silent majority is neutralized under the rule of the authoritarian states and the religious right across the region.

Efforts to avoid religion-based violence have the ironic ability to empower religionists by making the relatively moderate religious center appear to be the salvaging element in the equation. To protect against radical violent groups, some societies may find themselves instead accepting of the implementation of mainstream sharia, which is nonetheless religious law and
not constitutional law. The conservative right seeking to implement sharia in stages in some ways has the upper hand vis-à-vis the government because of its mastery of cultural language, the impression that it will act to calm tensions, and its control of the symbols of religion and religiosity. In the middle stand those torn between state and religious groups depending on the issues and situation. This is how a state like Kuwait could fail until 2006 to push for women’s right to vote or run for office. This is how countries acquiesce to the segregation of men and women in education and clubs to ostensibly ameliorate situations irrespective of the negative effects of such practices on development and future well-being. Sometimes, the state attempts to appropriate the symbols of religion to undermine moderate and extremist Islamists and in the end injects religion in education and sharia in other social sectors.

In the midst of these struggles, the state views civil society, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and freedom of expression of all kinds as challenges. In choosing between religious groups and liberalizing forces, governments have tended to favor the religious, often mistakenly believing that they can control the outcome. Middle Eastern states’ suspicions and fear of local (and international) NGOs, human rights organizations, and independent expression have resulted in weak civil societies and strengthened, sometimes inadvertently, religious groups. In short, the states see in centrist and civil society groups a long-term threat that undermines their power by seeking to lay the foundation for democracy. This lies at the root of the weakness of most governments of predominantly Islamic societies in dealing with the challenge of the religionists. At the end of the day, the states, in assessing what is best for them, have in essence created a situation in which the only choice is between the radical implementation of sharia and the supposedly moderate implementation of sharia. A centrist middle is missing because the state and the religious groups have decided that such a center—liberal, democratic, and secular—is counter to both their long-term objectives. (See the excellent book by Marwan Muasher: The Arab Center.)

The Future: State and Religion Amid Change

The development of the nation-state in modern world history established, for the most part, that sovereignty belongs to the state, not to religion, and that politics is a secular and a temporal activity. Challenging a state, when government is in the hands of an Islamic party that claims representation of the divine, is not equivalent to confronting a secular government. The separation of state and mosque or church or synagogue will continue to be an important achievement in all cultures, but the struggle between them will continue and will be reflected in laws and culture. Are the two one authority because an interpreter of Islam says there must be no separation or do societies create separation in addition to coeducational learning environments because they lend themselves to better education, benefit males and females in the workplace in a globalized economy, and contribute to building more equitable societies in general? Must laws and regulations be constructed on the basis of the daily needs of society or based on religious text? Whose interpretation of the world of God is the correct interpretation? The challenge is how to maintain levels of separation without sparking an extremist religionist reaction.

The relationship between religion and state in the Middle East has the potential to follow a number of paths, some of which are already being trodden.

- Surrender of the state to religion or religious zealots: government by sharia, possibly as in Afghanistan, Iran, or Sudan, or other areas; getting there will likely involve civil war.
- Defeat of religion: secular authoritarian governments prevail, ending the prospect of liberal democracy in the near term, as in Egypt, Iraq under Saddam, and Syria.
• Continuity of a state of violence and religious pressure: the state continues to resist implementation of sharia as demanded by religionists, but no middle path, as in Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. This power struggle cannot remain a permanent state of affairs.

• State and religion compromise with a focus on development and citizenship rights: States agree to further accommodate religion as long as it respects the rights of all groups and communities within society, including liberals, women, and religions and other minorities.

Key to this last model for the long term are economic development and prosperity and the creation of democracy and a dynamic civil society. In such a scenario, the state cannot undermine secular and liberal forces while granting concessions to Islamist trends. A fair playing field, or pitch, for political competition is important for such a model to succeed. Today Turkey is leaning in this direction. Bahrain, Jordan, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates—and potentially Lebanon and Kuwait, were they to resolve their more immediate crises—could move in this direction if the essence of such a view could penetrate state policies. The challenge is how to move in the direction of civil society and democracy while maintaining state neutrality and economic development.

Today’s postmodern world is a combination of old and new, but it remains on the course of compromise between secular states and mainstream religion; this has been the case since the Enlightenment. In this compromise, religious values are incorporated into state structures and practices as well as societal ethics, such as human and individual rights. In the postmodern world, religion has a place as long as it does not dominate, exclude and undermine difference. Inclusivity and coexistence—including the ability to be secular and simultaneously to respect religion and religious interpretation—are the essence of the era.

The implementation of sharia is carried out by people with their own biases, and like others, with a penchant for a degree of excess in some respects. With the passage of time, however, people are apt to recognize these biases and the corrupting influence of power. As Iran illustrates, claiming to govern by sharia does not put one closer to God than those who choose a different path. Such acknowledgment or self-revelation may open the way to compromises that resurrect religion as a spiritual force of importance to the individuals’ well-being. Today in a number of societies, the military has returned to the barracks and permitted civil society to manage the affairs of politics. When will religion in the Arab world return to the mosque and leave politics to politicians?
Muslims in Europe: An Introduction

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This paper aims to briefly present the basic facts and issues about Muslims in Europe, from a political and sociological perspective, and to offer elements of comparison with the U.S. There will be a slight emphasis on France, due to the author’s area of specialty—and to the fact that France is home to the largest number of Muslims in Europe.

A few popular myths about Islam in Europe should first be dispelled, in order to grasp the real issues and challenges:

Myth #1 – Being Muslim constitutes a fixed identity, sufficient to fully characterize a person. When it comes to Muslims, people wrongly assume that religion—rather than nationality, gender, social class, etc.—necessarily trumps other identities. To take just a few examples, the Washington Post, in a June 2008 article on migrations to the European Union (EU), writes about “Muslims arriving from the Middle East and Africa, and Eastern Europeans moving west”, even though a) not all of the migrants from this region are Muslims, b) “Eastern Europeans” would never be labeled “Orthodox” or “Catholics”, and c) that is not the issue anyway, since the article is about immigration. For a couple of weeks in November 2005, the media used the term “Muslims riots in France” to describe the wave of urban violence that resulted in burnt cars and property damage. But these riots had nothing to do with Islam, and everything to do with the social and economic conditions of largely immigrant communities. Muslim groups who tried to play a mediating role discovered themselves to be irrelevant and powerless.

Myth #2 – Muslims in Europe are, in one way or the other, inherently foreign, the equivalent of visiting Middle-Easterners who are alien to the “native” culture. (European culture, however, has always included Muslim elements, as early as the 8th Century). The approximately 15 to 17 million persons of Muslim background in the EU-27 countries (population: 500 million) include both citizens and non-citizens of European member states, but a majority of them hold French, British, German, etc., nationality. Many of them are proud of this fact and would never think of themselves as anything else than Europeans (even while honoring their heritage). Indeed, there is more difference in political culture and social codes between a French Muslim and a German Muslim than there is between a French Muslim and a French of other religious orientation.

Myth #3 – Muslims in Europe form a “distinct, cohesive and bitter group,” in the words of a 2005 Foreign Affairs article. In reality, they are anything but a cohesive group. Not only is there no unity to be found at the European level, but when one looks at the national level, what predominates is the profound divisions, either between countries of reference and their specific culture and brand of Islam (e.g.,
Belgians of Turkish origin vs. Belgians of Moroccan origin), between visions of religion and affiliation (e.g., German Turks associated with Milli Gürüş vs. those affiliated with Diyanet), or between social status, political views, ethnicity, etc. In other words, to speak of “a Muslim community” is simply misleading.

Myth #4 – Muslims are demographically gaining on the “native” population. The implicit assumption behind this very widespread myth is that Muslims form a distinct demographic bloc defined by religion, a bloc which will never blend into the rest of society (another possible assumption is based on ethnicity, “Muslims” being surrogate for “people of color” vs. white people). This assumption is contradicted by the significant rates of intermarriage and conversions (in both directions) and, more importantly, by the reality of integration in many countries, where Muslims are simply patriotic, law-abiding citizens—in this case, worries about demography have no basis, why would one count them apart? But even accepting that assumption of demographic blocs, “Muslims” are actually not significantly gaining on “natives.” True, European birthrates are generally low, and birthrates among immigrant groups are often high. But in the latter group, they actually fall rapidly after the arrival and among subsequent generations, as they tend to conform to the national norm. And in some countries like France or Ireland, general fertility rates are comparable to that observed in the U.S., around two children per woman. Last but not least, immigration to the EU is more and more tightly controlled. It is doubtful that from about 15-17 million in the 500 million EU-27 today (3 to 4 %), potential Muslims could number more than 6 % in the coming decades.

The European Patchwork

Although European Muslims share many common issues and challenges, a pan-European view is largely misleading. In Italy, the “immigrant character” of Islam has been stressed in the Consulta Islamica (the dialogue of the State with Muslims which started in 2005), and Denmark has faced specific problems with a very recent settlement of Muslims. Countries like Spain, by contrast, where the Comisión Islámica de España defines Islam as one of the spiritual faiths rooted in Spanish history, or France—where the colonial past led to early exchanges and the construction of a grand mosque in central Paris as early as 1926—see Islam as part of their history.

The main differences between EU countries, by increasing order of importance, have to do with:

1. The institutions and political philosophy of each country, especially as they relate to religion, the proper role of minorities, and multiculturalism;

2. The country of origin, or country of reference (for the children and grandchildren of immigrants) of Muslims;

3. The history of Muslim presence, and its modalities (“guest workers”, refugees, immigrants, converts, etc.), as well as the links of each country with the past (colonial tradition or not);

4. The number of Muslims relative to the general population, and their geographical concentration.

Before offering a brief snapshot of major European countries, it should be noted that the EU (Brussels) level is not relevant to deal with this issue, as the status of religions remains of national competence. However, the regional or local level often plays a key role, some states (Länder) being, for example, very active in their integration policies (like Rhineland-Westphalia, where more than a third of all Muslims in Germany live), or some municipalities of the same country taking opposing approaches (Rotterdam is financing Islamic education in its public schools, while Utrecht opposes it).

France, with 5 million potential Muslims (8% of the population), originating from Algeria,
Morocco, and to a lesser extent Turkey, Tunisia and sub-Saharan Africa, is home to a third of EU Muslims. A strict separation of church and state (laïcité) was gained in 1905 after very painful tensions, which have been reactivated in the recent decades about Islam. The debates surrounding the headscarf issue and the 2004 law banning religious signs in public schools are a good example. The government has heavy-handedly helped set up a French Council for the Muslim Religion (CFCM in French) in 2003, which represents Muslims for exclusively religious matters—as the French Republican vision of citizenship bans the recognition of separate (minority) identities in the public sphere. Given the challenges, France has been mostly successful at religious and cultural integration, as well as monitoring and preventing radicalization (it has the strongest anti-terrorism apparatus), but it has largely failed at social and economic integration of migrants (and their children and grandchildren), whatever their faith, as the urban violence of November 2005, and more recent flares, attest.

**Germany** is in a very different situation. It is home to 3.3 million Muslims (4% of the population), of which an overwhelming majority, at least 2.3 million, trace their origin to Turkey, including a large proportion who are still Turkish citizens. The proximity of Turkey, the “guest worker program” of the 1960s and early 1970s intended to provide a temporary surge of workers for German industry, and the ethno-cultural vision of German citizenship, combined to create a blocked situation up until the 1990s, as well as a dominance of Turkish religious authorities (the Ankara-based DİYANET, acting through its German branch the DİTİB) on German Islam. The reform of 2000, granting citizenship to most of those born in Germany, and the launching of a consultation process, the Deutsche Islam Konferenz (DIK) in 2006, have eased things somewhat. But there is persistent debate over German identity. This finds expression within the programs of the conservative parties (CDU and CSU), and also in the DIK process itself, which often blurs the distinctions between religious, social and security issues.

While Islam is still not an officially established church (corporation) like others, it does enjoy some public privileges—such as religious education in public schools—in some of the states (Länder).

**The United Kingdom** is home to 1.5 to 2 million Muslims (around 3% of the population), most of them originating in South Asia, especially Pakistan. After 9/11, and especially after 7/7 (the homegrown Islamist bombings of July 7, 2005), the UK has tended, along with the Netherlands, to veer away from a permissive multicultural environment, where even extremist preachers enjoyed extensive freedoms—“Londonistan”—to a set of policies stressing a common British identity and the need for the government to become more intrusive in Muslim education, the monitoring of mosques, etc. One of the results of the interventionist “Preventing Extremism Together” (PET) process launched after 7/7 has been the establishment of the MINAB (Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board), which aims to standardize guidelines for mosques around the country on subjects like the hiring of imams, and the fight against extremism.

**Italy** is home to approximately 1 million Muslims (1.5% of the population), and this presence is fairly new, coming mostly from Morocco and Albania—there is also a significant population of converts. After all, Italy was until the 1970s a country of emigration, not immigration. Islam in Italy came under the influence of outside governments (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Libya) until 2005, when the Berlusconi government launched the Consulta Islamica. There are still tensions within this consultative process that mixes an administrative agenda with social and political issues, and many, especially the Lega Nord (part of the current Berlusconi coalition) criticize the inclusion of some individuals. Moreover, only a limited number of Consulta participants have been invited to form a new Federation that would apply for an Intesa—a framework agreement between the Italian state and a given religion that grants the full rights of a recognized religious community.
The Netherlands is home to approximately 950,000 Muslims (almost 6% of the population), for which two countries of origin or reference emerge, Turkey and Morocco. Holland is a country which, by virtue of its turbulent religious history, had elaborated a far-reaching multicultural model of tolerance for difference and relative autonomy among religious communities. The brutal Islamist murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004 by Mohammed Bouyeri, a 26-year-old second-generation migrant born in Amsterdam and holding both Moroccan and Dutch citizenship, came as a huge shock. This event intensified reconsideration of the virtues of the Dutch model and fostered a hostile attitude against Muslims in parts of the population. Starting in 2005, the government launched a plan to prevent radicalization, improve social and economic integration and promote “Dutch values.” It has also encouraged the training of imams in Amsterdam and Leiden universities. One bright spot is the significant number of elected officials of Muslim background in national government and the lower Chamber of Parliament.

Spain is home to approximately 800,000 Muslims (close to 2% of the population), most of whom trace their recent or ancient roots to Morocco. While Muslims were expelled or forced to convert in 1492, freedom of religion was granted under Franco in 1968, and extended in 1980. Starting in 1992, the Comisión Islamica de España has negotiated with the government on many issues, like religious training in schools and the social status of imams, but progress has been slow, and there are lingering tensions with immigrant communities in Andalucía. The bombing of a Madrid commuter train, on March 11, 2004, was carried out by homegrown terrorists of Moroccan origin.

Muslims in Europe: Common Challenges

While problems and bad news naturally tend to dominate the news media, and while some processes in some countries are worrying, this should obscure neither the good news—such as the underreported growth of a middle class of Muslim background, quite an achievement given the very poor origins of most of them—nor the limits of some of the news-grabbing problems.

If one considers the reaction to the caricatures of Prophet Muhammad published by the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten in 2005-2006, for example, it is easy to forget—among the violent demonstrations in countries like Syria, Libya, Iran or Nigeria, resulting in more than 100 deaths—that in EU countries, no violence happened. Some individuals and Muslim organizations (like UCOII in Italy or UOIF in France) reacted through legal channels, such as peaceful demonstrations—in very limited numbers—or lawsuits, based on the purported racism inherent to some cartoons (like the “bomb in Muhammad turban” one). In France, once again, the origin of occasional urban violence is never to be found in cultural–religious issues like the headscarf ban in public schools or the caricatures of Muhammad, but always in the death of one or more youngsters in an encounter with police forces in some specific neighborhoods.

Five types of issues and challenges can be distinguished:

1. Some have nothing to do with Islam, starting with the social conditions of immigrants, their children and grandchildren, some of whom are Muslims. It is not that they are necessarily poor—solid European welfare states make absolute poverty virtually impossible. But many are often relegated to far-away outskirts and bleak housing projects, and are offered fewer opportunities than populations of older European origin. In spite of governmental efforts in almost every country, discrimination against Blacks, Arabs, South Asians, etc. (whatever their religion) extract a very heavy toll on both social and economic integration and sense of belonging to the national community. In France, unemployment (which averages 7.2% nationally) can reach 40% among young men in some housing projects. In Germany, very few
Turks get higher education—fewer than 25,000 of 236,000 Turkish 18 to 25 years old living in Germany were enrolled in German universities in 2004-2005. Discrimination is also noticeable in political representation, where very few non-whites are elected officials.

2. Others have everything to do with Islam, as they pertain to the exercise of religion. With varying degrees of success (generally not much), EU governments have tried to facilitate the local training of imams, including in the national language; the construction of mosques, with both an interdiction of the use of public funds, the refusal of seeing outside governments intervene too much, and the urge to get Islam out of the “basements” where it was often practiced in the 1980s and 1990s; the regulation of ritual slaughtering of lambs for the Aid festivity, with accompanying hygiene issues; the hiring of imams as chaplains for the armed forces or for prisons, where many inmates are Muslims; the setting up of Muslim private schools; the creation of Muslim sections in cemeteries; the regulation of the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, where many European Muslims (as well as others) are the victims of consumer fraud. On these issues that are crucial to demonstrate that Islam is not a foreign entity, progress has been slow, in spite of the new state-Islam consultative bodies established in almost every country.

3. Some have partly to do with Islam, like incidents concerning social values, whether a request by a local Muslim association to arrange for women-only hours at the municipal swimming pool, the refusal by some students to follow biology classes, the refusal to remove a headscarf in the situations where it is forbidden in some countries (like for civil servants in direct contact with the public in France), an unwillingness by female patients to be treated by male physicians in public hospitals, or honor crimes and domestic violence, forced marriages, etc. Some of these situations, especially among the latter, have more to do with specific regional cultures and traditions (from places like rural Anatolia or rural Morocco) among recent immigrants than with Islam, but there is still a clash with accepted social codes and, sometimes, the law of the land. Another issue partly related to Islam is the sense of belonging to the national community. While strong in some countries like France, in spite of discrimination, it is dangerously low in others like the UK, where more Muslims tend to emphasize the religious aspects of their identity. This estrangement is of course conducive, in some cases, to a more radical break-up with their country.

4. Terrorism is in a category of its own because of its dire challenge to public order. It does exist in relation with Islam, but radicalization concerns a tiny fraction of European Muslims, and it always occurs at the fringes of Muslim networks and mosques (except in the UK until recently), and not as an isolated outgrowth of some sort—which is precisely what makes it hard to monitor and fight. Indeed, there is as much in common between everyday Muslims and terrorists as there is between, say, a German social democrat (SPD) Member of Parliament and a terrorist from the Baader-Meinhof Red Army faction—both have socialism as a reference, but that is all there is. Contrary to a popular notion, European Muslims frequently and firmly condemn violent actions perpetrated in the name of Islam. EU countries have suffered a number of homegrown terrorist attacks of radical Islamist origins, and have been obliged to upgrade their anti-terrorism apparatus rapidly. It also has a different reading of terrorism in general than America has—one should remember
that there are more “regional” terrorists (from the Basque country, Corsica, etc.—but also far-left groups) in EU prisons than Islamist terrorists.

5. Finally, some challenges have to do with non-Muslim populations and their perceptions of Islam. On top of racial discrimination, there is a specific targeting of Islam (Islamophobia), which manifests itself in attacks on mosques and the desecration of Muslim graves. But apart from these extreme cases, there is a constant schizophrenia in Europe—between excessive requests of conformity and misplaced demonstrations of “tolerance” or “multiculturalism” when it comes to Islam—which borders on condescension. In the former category, some Länder have requested citizenship tests for naturalization that include adopting a list of ill-defined German “values” (about homosexuality, abortion, etc.) with which not even all Germans would agree. In the latter category, a German judge has cited the Qur’an in rejecting a German Muslim woman’s request for a fast-track divorce on the ground that her husband beat her; and the Archbishop of Canterbury recently suggested Sharia law might have some relevance to the British legal system. Needless to say, such excesses make European Muslims cringe—they just want to be treated as any other citizen.

A Quick Comparison with America

The difference with America is easy to grasp. While most of the 2 to 3 million Muslims of America (close to 1% of the population), of which 77% are citizens, are first-generation immigrants, they enjoy much better social conditions than European Muslims, as they generally mirror the U.S. public in education and income, including at the highest end of the income scale. They are not concentrated in pockets of poverty and disaffection. They benefit from a powerful integration process, including a dynamic job market and a multicultural environment—even after expressions of racism and Islamophobia following 9/11. There has been little radicalization, and the few cells and plots which were uncovered demonstrated a lack of seriousness. One common point with European Muslims, however, is that they do not form a coherent group. While Black Muslims make up 20 to 30% of the total, almost 25% originate from the Arab world, about 20% from South Asia, and the rest from all parts of the world, including Europe.
Southeast Asia is an oft overlooked area of the world when it comes to debates on Islam and U.S. policy—yet in many ways it may offer to the rest of the Muslim world the best model of diversified, democratic, globally engaged Islam. Islam is experienced and practiced very differently in Southeast Asia than in the rest of the Muslim world—the gradual integration of Islam into a highly diversified cultural and ethnic landscape, the need for harmony among such varied peoples living closely together, and the geopolitical contingencies of an archipelagic context all mean that Islam has a different political valence in Southeast Asia than it does in the Middle East or South Asia.

That said, it would be a mistake to assume that the story of Islam in Southeast Asia is purely one of happy, harmonious, ‘Islam with a smiling face’ as it is often described. Complexity and nuance are the calling cards of most aspects of life in the region—and Islam is no exception. Some of the worst terrorist acts after 9/11 have taken place in Southeast Asia—which is home to Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia, Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, and a very bloody insurgency movement in southern Thailand.

It is that complexity, and the distinctions of Islam in Southeast Asia, that have eluded U.S. policymakers as they have sought to find an effective approach to the region. Immediately after 9/11, the U.S. response was to treat Islam monolithically, and to react with suspicion towards all Muslims. So visa restrictions for Muslim applicants from Indonesia, and the requirement for all Muslim students in the U.S. to register with the Department of Homeland Security were two policies which particularly offended Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, a vibrant democracy, and a long-time friend and ally of the U.S.

Later, when U.S. policymakers realized that one of their most strategic allies in the ‘Global War on Terror’ was like-minded Muslim leaders, it was too late to take optimal advantage of what should have been a natural partner in this effort. Indonesians and Malaysians reacted at best with polite amusement to former Undersecretary of State Charlotte Beers’ public relations campaign aimed at showing the U.S. as home to happy, healthy Muslims. More problematically, in the years 2002-2005, when anti-American sentiment was at its peak in the region, any Muslim leaders promoting values of democracy, pluralism, or tolerance were discredited as being stooges of the west and of American foreign policy. This was particularly ironic as, partially due to reaction to the war on terror, indigenous Muslim democrats—precisely the kind of allies later U.S. public diplomacy policy sought to engage—were often delegitimized and rendered impotent.

Despite these setbacks, anti-U.S. sentiment in the region, as well as support for a hard-line Islamist agenda, is on the downturn. With the exception of the ongoing violence in southern
Thailand, terrorism is in retreat. Elections in Indonesia and Malaysia have served to moderate militant momentum. The U.S. has the opportunity now to engage in a productive way with this key region in the Muslim world.

This is a strategic time for re-evaluation and re-engagement in the region because, contrary to alarmist notions of pan-Islamism on the rise and terrorist activity in Southeast Asia propagated by some analysts and international observers, in the four main Muslim areas of Southeast Asia—Indonesia, Malaysia, Mindanao (in the Philippines) and southern Thailand—a sense of crisis is receding and positive trending is visible. Islamic parties, and their role in governance, are an important part of this transformation.

**Indonesia**

Indonesia has one of the most stable political party systems in the region. Since the fall of Suharto in 1998, Indonesians have held two national parliamentary elections, direct presidential elections, and are in the process of holding direct elections for chief executives in nearly 500 districts and provinces. While Islamist parties, forcibly suppressed during the authoritarian period (1965-1998), mushroomed immediately upon Suharto’s fall—42 Islamic parties were formed within 2 months—they have not managed to consolidate popular support translating into electoral success.

The electoral record and polling data speak for themselves in terms of levels of support for an Islamist political agenda. Indonesian voters have been fairly consistent in their choices in national elections, and since 1999, the portion of the vote garnered by Islamist parties has never reached even the 25% level. In 1999 the Islamist vote was 16%, and in 2004 it rose slightly to 21% due to the gains made by the PKS (Prosperous Justice Party) campaigning on a counter-corruption platform. After two years of direct local elections of mayors, governors, and district heads however, it appears that the electoral record is even more unsupportive of an Islamist agenda. Overall to date, less than 10% of local elections have been won by candidates hailing from an Islamist party or a coalition of Islamist parties. The biggest winners thus far have been the candidates coming from a coalition of Islamic and Nationalist parties, at 37%, followed closely by candidates coming from Nationalist parties, at 32.6%.

Similarly, nationwide polling conducted by LSI (Indonesian Survey Institute) in late 2007 indicated that 57% of Indonesians self-identified with ‘secular’ political values, and only 33% with ‘Islamist’ political values. Further, only 8% said that, if elections were held then, they would support an Islamist political party.

A notable feature of the Indonesian political party landscape is the near absence of extremist parties opposing the democratic system or Pancasila—Indonesia’s political ideology which enshrines religious freedom and tolerance. There are three main parties which hold an Islamist agenda—two of them PBB (Crescent and Star Party) and PPP (United Development Party), are holdovers from the New Order (Suharto regime, 1966-1998), and unlikely to garner strong wins in the upcoming 2009 elections. PKS, the third major Islamist party, has more potential, and gained 7% of the vote in the 2004 elections. PKS was founded in mid 1998, strongly influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood ideology and organizational principles. It is one of Indonesia’s only cadre-based parties, and in earlier years espoused a strongly Islamist agenda. Over time, however, with savvy political calculations, the party leaders downplayed their sharia based platform and replaced it with an anti-corruption, pro-justice platform—effectively increasing their electoral support six-fold in the 2004 elections. Since then, PKS has had a varied record in the direct local elections—winning by some counts up to 50% of the elections they have competed for, but with some poor performance and corruption issues marring their highly-disciplined, anti-corruption platform.
**Malaysia**

As in Indonesia, gains made by the main Islamist party competing in the most recent elections have been as a result of a toning down of Islamist rhetoric, and alliance building with other opposition parties. The Islamist Partai Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) gained 23 parliamentary seats in the March 8 national elections (in 2004 they won only 7), and in coalition with two other opposition parties, took control of 5 of the 13 states, and upset the ruling National Front’s two-thirds majority in parliament.

This electoral success has been vindication for those within PAS who have been pushing the party for the last few years to moderate its stance on sharia, to recruit more non-Muslim representatives, and to modernize its platform. PAS had previously been well known for its efforts to implement hudud law (criminal law—the cutting off of hands for thievery and the like) in the two states that it controlled—Terengganu and Kelantan. The Malaysian government’s extraordinary (and authoritarian) response to 9/11 and the U.S. war on terror effectively sidelined Islamist movements, including PAS, and made it safer politically for Islamic leaders to affiliate themselves with the ruling UMNO party. In the 2004 elections therefore PAS suffered heavy defeats, after which it began an internal process of reinventing itself as a moderate and modern party.

Now, for the first time since independence, the opposition coalition (Pakatan Rakyat, PR) has a chance of unseating the National Front. Much will depend on the strategy taken by PAS on the issue of its Islamist platform. Some PAS leaders have called for sharia implementation and Islamization measures to be taken in Selangor and the other states newly controlled by the PR. Other coalition members—which include a Chinese-based party and the multi-ethnic People’s Justice Party, have taken exception to this.

Meanwhile, Islam admittedly plays an important role in the governance of Malaysia—where Islam is given special status in the constitution, and where political parties compete to be seen as more Islamic. State institutions often use Islam as a vehicle for control and regulation—though the trending, again, is a loosening of those regulations. For example, a Malaysian religious court in Penang ruled in April that a woman could convert from Islam to Buddhism, her original religion. This was seen as a landmark case that would pave the way for increasing religious freedom in the country.

**Philippines/Mindanao**

The Philippines in general and Mindanao in particular suffer from extremely weak and factionalized political parties, which makes electoral politics unstable and less than effective. The Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was created in 1989, and is comprised of six provinces and two cities, and almost 5 percent of the population. Since 1996 the MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front) has controlled the ARMM, but has opted not to become a political party. The MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) also has not become a political party—so the two main groups claiming to represent the Muslim voice in the Philippines do not operate as political parties.

There are currently five Muslim political parties registered in the ARMM—two of which are inactive. There are also several sectoral groups or ‘party lists’ that compete in the national parliamentary elections—in 2007, only one of these won a seat in the national parliament. The weakness of the political parties in the ARMM results in governance being not only unstable but also dominated by clans, strongmen, and money politics. This has inhibited peace-building, the resolution of rivalries between the MILF and MNLF, and any real autonomy for Muslim Mindanao.

The terrorist activities of the Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah in Mindanao in the last two years have been relatively effectively countered by the U.S.-backed Philippine military—though
the prolonged violence and suffering of vast swathes of the Muslim Mindanao population as a result may be increasing support for an Islamist agenda. However, there is little evidence that a truly Islamist/extremist agenda is supported, either through electoral politics or through anti-democratic means.

Southern Thailand

For the past few years, Thailand has been beset by political upheaval in opposition to the regime of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra—which ultimately resulted in a military coup in September 2006 followed by a constitutional referendum in August 2007. In addition, since 2004, Thailand has been experiencing insurgency in the five southernmost provinces, which has resulted in over 2,000 deaths. Five percent of the Thai population is Muslim, though Muslims make up over 70% of the population in Southern Thailand.

Prior to 2004, the Muslim vote was primarily channeled through a mechanism called the ‘Wahdah’, which was an interparty faction dominated by the Democrat Party, most famously represented by Surin Pitsuan, who was Foreign Minister from 1992-2001. When Thaksin and the Thai Rak Thai party took power in 2001, Bangkok tried to reassert control over the ‘Muslim south’, with outbreaks of violence beginning in response in 2003.

The conflict in the South is multidimensional, but is largely wrapped up with issues of identity—particularly the identity of the Malay Muslims and relations of power vis-à-vis Bangkok. Many analysts find that it is in fact state driven and perpetuated, in the sense that the central state did not allow room for a Malay Muslim identity, instead enforcing a heterogeneous ‘Thai Muslim’ identity. The framing of the conflict as a religious conflict is misleading, and has resulted in some unfortunate consequences including the engagement of the international community. Long-term analysts of Southern Thailand agree that the conflict is not one of pan-Islamism or international terrorist networks—and that framing it as such mobilizes the international Muslim community in unhelpful ways.

U.S. policy in the region has been heretofore primarily one of very low-profile engagement, at least in public; this is widely seen as effective. There are conspiracy theories circulating in the South that the U.S. has engineered the violence in order to justify military engagement; as a result, the U.S. has wisely been restrained in its presence and involvement in the conflict.

Policy Implications for the U.S.

Across the board in Southeast Asia when Islamist and political Islam groups are marginalized or disenfranchised, they have tended to radicalize, resulting in episodes of violence. Some scholars have argued compellingly that this should not be interpreted as increasing radicalization or extremism on the part of the societies as a whole—but rather as the reverse, increasing weakness on the part of radical groups resulting in violence. This, and other norms from the Southeast Asian experience, presents a set of policy implications for the U.S.:

- While recognizing the diversity of expression and interpretation within Islam, the U.S. should not attempt to favor or strengthen particular ‘elements’ within Islam; U.S. government policy towards Muslims or the Muslim world should be devoid of theological or interpretational bias.

- Recognition that extremism, even in the name of religion, is not always about religion should engender policy-making related to more direct causal issues—economics, class, political enfranchisement, etc.

- Political party training and support across the board can be effective—if both Islamic and non-Islamic parties are more disci-
plined and provide efficacious vehicles for political participation, radicalization and violence is likely to lose appeal.

• Support for democracy is important, however in many areas of Southeast Asia ‘democracy discourse’ has been discredited; as a result it will be more effective to support substantive elements of democracy—rule of law, anti-corruption, women’s political participation, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, etc.
Islam: Governance and Ideology and U.S. Policy

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August 17-23, 2008

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Violent Islamic Networks and Their Meaning for U.S. Policy

Peter Bergen, Harvard University

Al Qaeda may be the most notorious Islamic terror network but it is not the only one dedicated to the violent overthrow of western democracies and Muslim autocracies. Others include Jemaah Islamiyya, which is active in Southeast Asia, and the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group and Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, which are active in North Africa and Europe. It is important to understand the philosophy and modus operandi of these groups, what they believe in, what they hope to achieve, and their chosen methods for attaining these goals. It is also necessary to examine the links and cooperation among these terror networks.

Discussion Questions

- Is the ultimate goal of the violent Islamic networks the eviction of the West from Muslim lands or the establishment of the Ummah?
- Is the overthrow of autocratic Islamic regimes a necessary step in the process or can these regimes be co-opted?
- Is the use of suicide missions part of the ideology of the groups or merely an effective tactical method of warfare?
- How relevant is Osama Bin Laden today? What will be the impact on al Qaeda if he dies of natural causes, is killed, or captured?
Islamic Parties in the Arab World: What They Stand for and How They Would Govern

Shafeeq Ghabra, Kuwait University

The success of the FIS (Islamic Salvation Front), Hamas and Hezbollah in democratic elections in Algeria, Palestine and Lebanon has led many to believe that Islamic political parties have a simple agenda: “One man, one vote, one time.” The endless crackdowns by the Egyptian government against the Muslim Brotherhood reflect this fear. Yet Islamic parties have participated in peaceful elections and assemblies in some Arab countries including Jordan and Kuwait. To what extent can one generalize about Islamic parties in the Arab world? What common features do they have? What is their perspective on western democracy with its strong emphasis on individual freedoms and human rights?

Discussion Questions

• Which have been the most successful and most troubling experiences with Islamic parties in the Arab world?
• What are the main differences between the key Islamic parties?
• Is there a moderate wing to the Muslim Brotherhood? What are its views on social rights?
• What are the latest developments in political reform in the Gulf countries?

Muslims in Europe: Distinctions and Similarities with the U.S. Experience

Justin Vaisse, The Brookings Institution

Europe faces a serious challenge from its growing Muslim population. However, there are significant differences among the Muslim communities in each European country. France’s and Spain’s Muslims are mainly of North African background, Germany’s Muslims herald from Turkey and Bosnia, Britain’s Muslims are mainly from South Asia. The smaller European countries such as Denmark and Holland have faced traumatic confrontations with Islamic extremists, and strong political backlash against Muslim immigration is now underway. Perhaps the most serious issue is the emergence of European-born Islamic extremists who are prepared to conduct acts of mass violence against civilian populations. The bombings and attempted bombings in London are prime examples of such acts.

Discussion Questions

• Which European countries have been the most and least successful in confronting the security, social and economic consequences of the Islamic challenge?
• How much Islamic anger is based on social and economic conditions as distinct from religious antagonisms?
• Is growing anti-Semitism in Europe primarily a Muslim issue related to the Arab-Israeli conflict or are other factors at work?
• What is the relationship between the extremism of Europe’s Muslims and the generational factor?
• What lessons should U.S. decision-makers draw from the European experience?
Afghanistan: Where Did We All Go Wrong and How Can It Be Fixed?
Remarks by Lakhdar Brahimi
Former Director, United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan

Mutual Perceptions and Misperceptions: Islamic and American Attitudes
Remarks by Dalia Mogahed, Gallup Center for Muslim Studies

What do opinion polls tell us about Muslim attitudes toward American society, the war on terrorism, the war in Iraq and the role of Islam in modern society?

Islamist Parties in Southeast Asia: The Experience to Date
Robin Bush, The Asia Foundation, Jakarta

Since 9/11 Americans have been preoccupied with the role and behavior of Islamic parties in the Middle East. Far less attention has been paid to the role Islamic parties play in the politics of Southeast Asia. Yet Indonesia is the world’s most populous Muslim country, and Malaysia is one of the most successful. There have been horrific acts of terror in the region, most notably the Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005 which were directed against western tourists, mainly from Australia. It is important to understand the experience of the Southeast Asian countries in dealing with their terrorism problems and the challenges they pose for governance.

Discussion Questions

• What are the basic attitudes of the key Islamic parties of Southeast Asia toward the West, secularism and civic society, including minority rights?

• Has terrorism in Southeast Asia changed the attitude and behavior of moderate Islamic parties towards extremism? Are their policies successful? What is the linkage between Islamic extremism and separatism?

• What are the similarities and dissimilarities between Southeast Asian Islamic parties and their counterparts in the Middle East and South Asia?

• How do the Islamic parties relate to the growing role of China, India and Japan in their region?