



PARTICIPATING SCHOLARS

CSIS would like to thank and acknowledge the experts who spoke at the conference. This group's rich and varied experience in government, policy research, and academia allowed us to consider issues from multiple points of view.

Conference speakers included:

- **Jon Alterman**, Director, CSIS Middle East Program
- **Jon Anderson**, Professor, Catholic University of America
- **Maha Azzam**, Associate Fellow, Chatham House
- **Jocelyn Cesari**, Director, Islam in the West Program, Harvard University
- **Elizabeth Mueller Gross**, Vice President, Pew Research Center
- **Muqtedar Khan**, Assistant Professor, University of Delaware
- **Peter Mandaville**, Assistant Professor, George Mason University
- **Dalia Mogahed**, Executive Director, Gallup Center for Muslim Studies
- **Sulayman Nyang**, Professor, Howard University
- **Mustapha Kamal Pasha**, Professor, University of Aberdeen
- **Hasan-Askari Rizvi**, Pakistan Studies Scholar, SAIS
- **Robert Satloff**, Executive Director, Washington Institute for Near East Policy
- **Teresita Schaffer**, Director, CSIS South Asia Program
- **Naimah Talib**, Assistant Professor, Northern Illinois University

SHARED VALUES, SHARED FATE: MUSLIM IDENTITY IN THE GLOBAL AGE

Overview

Increasingly, Muslim identity goes beyond the way in which people live their daily lives and extends to the way they view their neighbors, their governments, Muslims outside their countries, and the non-Muslim world. Whereas notions of transnational Muslim solidarity were abstract for centuries, the steady migration of people and ideas—due in part to the rise of electronic media—have made Muslims' connection to an international Muslim community far more immediate.

In an effort to understand better the forms of Muslim identity and how nonradical networks and identities shape the views of Muslims across the globe, the Middle East and South Asia programs at CSIS convened a one-day conference on May 30, 2007. The conference brought together a broad range of scholars from a wide spectrum of disciplines, with expertise stretching around the globe.

Key Points

- Among most people in the world, Muslims included, religion is just one of multiple identities. Though religion does not necessarily trump other sources of identity such as ethnicity and nationality, its implicit assertion of divine endorsement gives it a special claim to authority. Traditions such as a single annual pilgrimage for Muslims around the world help emphasize common Muslim identities; so, too, do lavishly funded efforts to promote orthodox understandings of Islam among diverse communities.
- Even when Muslim networks focus on local issues, they often use global issues such as the Palestinian cause to make a point about how the world operates. In some cases, political parties also use global issues, such as opposition to the war in Iraq, for political gain.
- Many Muslim groups share historical narratives emphasizing a sense of suffering from injustice. Other narratives perceive that violence and retribution are legitimate, that moral purification is necessary to strengthen society, and that the West is hypocritical in its relations with Muslim states and societies.
- Though they often cloak themselves in tradition, many Muslim networks are among the most modern organizations in the world, using high-tech modes of recruitment, communication, and information distribution. They are adaptive, dynamic, and highly opportunistic.
- The increasing salience of religious identity to Muslims means in part that broad populations may be more sympathetic to ideas that resonate with that identity than those that seem foreign or imposed. For example, Islamic theology includes a richly developed literature on the notion of "justice" that can engage across the religious-secular spectrum, whereas "democracy" is often seen as a secular foreign import.

Main Themes

Over the last five years, a huge amount of attention and resources has been devoted to understanding radical transnational Muslim movements. Far less, however, has been focused on understanding the evolving ties between mainstream Muslims, who represent an overwhelming preponderance of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims. Away from the radical and violent fringes, an evolving sense of identity and solidarity is taking hold and shaping the way Muslims view their place in the world. The emerging pan-Muslim worldview manifests itself not only in the Middle East, but in urban America, in the slums of West Africa, and in the glistening cities of Southeast Asia.

Transnational Muslim identities do not take a single form, nor do they share identical contents. For some, the connection is principally one of faith and charity. For others, it has an explicitly political connection, influencing both how one believes one's country

should be governed and how one sees other governments. In some countries, Islamic identity is intertwined in complicated ways with national identity. Especially in Pakistan, the two reinforce each other and tend to heighten animosity toward India and sometimes, at the popular level, toward the United States. In most Muslim communities, support for the Palestinian cause is often

Increasingly, the United States is used as a foil for an unacceptable status quo, and identity is often characterized by opposition to the United States.

taken for granted as a pan-Islamic issue; anti-Americanism is increasingly seen as an adjunct. The Danish cartoon affair and the controversy over the Pope's speech were both associated with significant mobilization of transnational Muslim sentiment.

The CSIS conference considered public opinion polls, which suggest that Islam is an increasingly dominant frame of reference for Muslims around the world. Elizabeth Mueller Gross discussed recent Pew polling among American Muslims, which found that a majority are decidedly American and largely middle class. Dalia Mogahed, of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, argued that their polling suggests that Islam has a unique ability to engage its followers at both the local and global levels, but it is on the local level that Muslim networks are often most robust.

Consensus emerged that there is no single attitude toward Islamic identity, and its shape is often a consequence of social, political, and local contexts. The degree of openness in political systems and the role of Islamic political parties provide another layer to the formation of Muslim identity. On the international

level, Islamic parties often manipulate global issues such as the Palestinian struggle to demonstrate how the world operates; still, as in the United States, local issues often determine the shape and outcome of political contests. Naimah Talib cited the example of the interplay between international and local Islamic issues in how religious parties in Southeast Asia target their constituencies. The Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) for example, a party that appeals to conservative Malays who identify as Muslims, has used the war in Iraq to capitalize on local anti-American sentiment. During the Afghan war, it also encouraged Muslim youth to participate in jihad against the Soviets. Talib argued that many of these parties respond to the electorate, and that local circumstances and politics drive which issues these parties choose to highlight.

Mustapha Kamal Pasha outlined four common narratives that link Muslims throughout the world. First, the historical injustice narrative perceives Muslims as victims of Western attacks and humiliation through motifs such as the Crusades, colonialism, and the Palestinian struggle. Second, violence, including violence against civilians, is seen as moral retribution in an asymmetrical war waged by the West on Islam. Third, moral purification has become a rallying point for many movements including Salafis and even more moderate forces to decry Western influence as cultural pollution. This narrative is accentuated by anxiety over gender roles and the decline of patriarchal systems. Finally, the desire to demonstrate Western hypocrisy drives radicals to seek to provoke the West into changing its liberal identity through an unending war. Pasha argued that this desire to provoke an illiberal response has been largely the strategy of al Qaeda-inspired movements around the world.

These narratives are fueled by three central grievances. First, Muslims perceive a Western lack of respect for Islam, epitomized by the Danish cartoon episode. Second, they share a sense of continuing injustice and that past wrongs have never been fully accounted for. Finally, the illegitimacy and ineffectiveness of the modern state throughout the Muslim world has been encapsulated by the abandonment of development as a goal (as manifested by industrialization) and its replacement by the quest for modernity (as manifested by trade).

Tensions between the modern nation-state and traditional forms of identity have spurred a competition for authority within Islam. Numerous actors and centers now compete for Islamic legitimacy and followers, ranging from traditional theocratic hierarchies to autodidacts schooled on the Internet. In this regard, it is telling that none of the September 11 hijackers had seminary training. Government-sponsored clerics represent the intrusion of the secular into the spiritual, in both Muslim majority and minority countries. (Muqtedar Khan noted that there are more government-sponsored imams in Belgium per capita than anywhere else in the world). Maha Azzam cited the growing importance of independent religious authorities like Yusuf Qaradawi as examples

of those who have also emerged to claim a space within Islam. In addition, nonclerical voices like Amr Khaled and Tariq Ramadan have entered the crowded arena and achieved immense success by blending modern media techniques with advice on how to lead good Muslim lives. Despite greater competition, both Peter Mandaville and Robert Satloff questioned whether the state's declining influence in the Islamic sphere was as dire as some have predicted.

Policy Implications

Toward a change in regional perceptions

The age of secular politics in the Muslim world has failed to deliver development and economic opportunity for a majority of the world's Muslims. After the optimism that set in at the end of the colonial period, a rising number of young people feel not only disadvantaged and wronged, but also culturally rootless. Secular liberals—the most visible heirs to the Western legacy in these countries—are increasingly marginalized in local debates, for they have been unable either to dislodge the authoritarian order in their societies or create a positive and attainable vision for their societies that enjoys broad appeal. Islam has emerged as the strongest alternative to the present order, providing both a feeling of authenticity and a comprehensive critique of the status quo. Increasingly, the United States is used as a foil for that unacceptable status quo, both undermining national interests and helping secure and legitimize the rule of despots. Democracy discourse has become a dialogue of the deaf, seen both as an effort to impose American norms on other societies, and as a cynical cover for the continued support of repressive regimes out of a narrow security interest. More effective engagement requires the United States to align itself with causes that Muslims care about and to be a vehicle for helping them achieve their goals.

Focus on justice

Several conference participants suggested that the U.S. push for democracy in the Muslim world is ill directed and argued instead for a U.S. concentration on the idea of promoting justice. The idea of justice is deeply developed in Muslim thought, and the concept needs no translation for Muslim audiences. The sudden rise of Islamist political parties named some variant of "Justice and Development," in Turkey, Morocco, and elsewhere, is a sign

of just how powerful this idea is. Articulating a U.S. position as one of supporting justice around the world—and equally important, having a policy that does so as well—would do a tremendous amount to reposition the United States with Muslim publics, to engage Muslim networks, and to demonstrate that the United States is using its power as a force for collective good rather than for malice.

Engage diverse networks

The emergence of Islam and identity politics as a political force has coincided with heightened cultural and religious consciousness throughout the Muslim world. In some cases the confluence of the two produces radicalization, but this is not a given. Participants argued that the opportunity exists for broad and meaningful engagement with a more ideologically diverse set of actors. Part of the problem participants saw was a U.S. inclination to work with only a small part of the religious community in many countries—moderates who support, or at least maintain their silence about, a wide variety of U.S. government policies and have some degree of support for Western-style separations of church and state. Those whom the United States has defined as "moderates" are increasingly marginalized within their societies, and identifying them as moderates sometimes marginalizes them still further. Participants argued vigorously that moderates in the Muslim world today are not necessarily those who embrace liberal Western values, but rather those who seek to reconcile cultural and religious values with modernity. Most participants agreed that expanding contacts well beyond traditional clienteles—that is, secular liberals with Western graduate degrees—is vital for capturing the imaginations of future generations in Muslim-majority countries.

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THE CSIS COMMISSION ON SMART POWER

The Muslim Networks conference was held as part of the CSIS Commission on Smart Power. CSIS has convened a high-level, bipartisan commission chaired by Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye that includes national leaders in government, elective office, the military, NGOs, media, academia, and the private sector. The Commission will meet three times in 2007 to develop a blueprint for revitalizing America's inspirational leadership and, drawing on the research and analysis of regional and functional experts at CSIS, will make recommendations for developing an integrated policy to strengthen U.S. influence, image, and effectiveness in the world. The Commission enjoys generous support from the Starr Foundation. The Commission's final report will be issued in fall 2007 and will aim to help shape the political debate during the 2008 presidential campaign. ■

Key Uncertainties

While participants agreed on many issues, they also recognized that the rise of Muslim networks creates challenges with deep and broad implications that are not yet fully understood.

■ Broader U.S. engagement with Muslim actors

The challenge of a more inclusive approach is that many non-radical Muslims hold views that fundamentally contradict Western liberal values, including women's rights and circumstances in which violence is warranted. There is understandable reluctance to engage with those who defend the legitimacy of suicide bombing in Israel, for example, or who insist that Muslims should have different rights than non-Muslims in Muslim-majority societies. Yet without reaching out to a broader set of interlocutors, the United States will not only isolate itself even further from the mainstream in Muslim societies, but also remain blind to significant developments and rising forces in Muslim society. If the goal is to create more pluralism in these societies, it is hard to see how to get there without engaging with a broader diversity of actors, including those who hold some offensive views. Reconciling the need to reach more broadly with the need to be true to American values will be an ongoing challenge.

■ Transnational Muslim networks and the authority of the state

How states will continue to accommodate the rise of Muslim networks, especially authoritarian states, will be a major challenge for these states in the years ahead. Their strategy up to now has been to promote state religious institutions, but non-state clerics and lay experts increasingly question their legitimacy. The rise of literacy, combined with the spread of information technology, increasingly flattens the playing field between regime clerics and their sometimes lay-led opposition. It is unclear if regimes will continue to yield space to extra-governmental religious actors, or whether they will take more decisive action to control the religious sphere, as governments such as Morocco have recently done.

■ Evaluating Muslim attitudes

Polling data on Muslim opinion concentrates on beliefs rather than actions, and it rarely seeks to connect the two. Instead, the connection is assumed to be implicit. This connection needs to be examined so as to distinguish between *pro forma* rhetorical support and incipient activism.

■ Radicalization and cultural consciousness

Increased cultural consciousness in Islamic societies and radicalization are assumed to be identical, or at least parallel, trends. The rise in headscarves among women, for example, is widely seen as an indicator of zealotry. While the two may overlap in certain cases, their confluence is not a given. Greater effort must be made to distinguish between cultural or religious identity and radicalization.

■ Muslim networks in the West

The lines between Muslim majority and minority countries are increasingly blurred, and its utility as a descriptive variable is no longer clear. Half of all Muslims live as religious minorities, but for recent immigrants immersed in the Information Age, they often remain intimately tied to their countries of origin. The rapid movement of ideas and people across state boundaries not only raises questions of how the immigrant assimilation process will change as a result, but also how ideas from outside Muslim majority countries can filter back into those countries and change approaches to religion and religious practice.

Conclusion

Muslim identity is in constant flux. Among mainstream Muslims, increased literacy and education, travel, and communications technology have changed the nature of transnational links. This is true not only among Muslim-majority communities from Morocco to Malaysia, but also with the Muslim diasporas of Europe, North America, and beyond. Shaped by an increasingly diverse range of influences and ideas, Muslim identity has grown in complexity. Understanding how nonradical Muslim networks set agendas, mobilize populations, and coordinate action throughout the world is vital to ensuring that future interaction with Muslim actors is both successful and well informed. How these ties evolve will be a powerful force shaping the twenty-first century world, both within the Muslim-majority countries and outside them.

Acknowledgments

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