

WRR

SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL FOR GOVERNMENT POLICY

What Future for Political Islam?

DILEMMAS AND OPPORTUNITIES
FOR THE NEXT DECADE

Graham Fuller
Marcel Kurpershoek

WRR *lecture 2004*

WRR

SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL FOR GOVERNMENT POLICY

What Future for Political Islam?

*Dilemmas and Opportunities
for the Next Decade*

WRR lecture 2004

Graham Fuller

Marcel Kurpershoek

Cover design: Studio Daniëls bv, Den Haag
Lay-out: Het Steen Typografie, Maarssen

ISBN 90-808997-3-9

© WRR / Scientific Council For Government Policy, The Hague 2005

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.

CONTENTS

Introduction	5
<i>Wim van de Donk</i>	
Political Islam in Action	15
<i>Graham Fuller</i>	
The Catch 22 of Political Islam	27
<i>Marcel Kurpershoek</i>	
About the Authors	43

WHAT FUTURE FOR POLITICAL ISLAM?

INTRODUCTION

As the topic for the second WRR lecture (The Hague, December 9th, 2004), the council decided on 'the future of political Islam'. This topic turned out to be both timely and appropriate. Both politicians and policymakers badly need knowledge and genuine understanding of Islam, political Islam and the complex relationship between the two. Without an adequate understanding and knowledge, it will most likely be fear and not facts that guides policies, both the foreign and the domestic ones. Understanding Islam both as a religious, cultural and political phenomenon will help to look beyond the easy images that are so widely available in the media, these weapons of mass seduction. In the long run, mutual learning and dialogue, instead of clear-cut clashes and confrontations are the attitudes that are urgently needed. These attitudes have to be informed by research. The lectures by Graham Fuller and Marcel Kurpershoek that you will find in this booklet are important contributions to such an understanding. The council is happy to publish them in a series of publications that the Council has and will devote to this subject.¹

The poor integration of some groups of Muslims in the Netherlands and other EU member states, the growing assertiveness of second-generation Muslims, and the world-wide rise of fundamentalism and Islamic terrorism have placed 'Islam' and 'Muslims' in increasingly controversial position. The attacks of 9/11 dramatically changed the social and political climate and awoke dormant feelings of deep unease. Subsequently, much of the discourse on relations between Western and Muslim states has been cast in the mould of the 'clash of civilisations', to use the phrase coined by Samuel Huntington (Huntington 1993 and 1996). Ethnic violence became more quickly associated with Islam and visible communities of religious Muslims more quickly labelled as dangerous fundamentalists. The attacks in Madrid and London have further strengthened this tendency. These dramatic events have contributed to the idea that the Islamic world and the West are incompatible, and that the

Islamic worldview has no room for the attributes of Western democratic constitutional states; it is said to favour establishing the state on theocratic, as opposed to democratic, principles.

Islam, like Christianity, has many faces. As far as Christianity is concerned, there are considerable differences, both within and between countries and regions, and the development of the relationship between church and state varies from country to country. While this is a generally accepted fact in Europe, far less is known about the different manifestations of Islam. Consequently, there is a tendency to consider and discuss Islam in terms of generalities. What people often do not know is that Islam, like Christianity, is a religion of many different creeds and beliefs. The relationship between state and religion varies widely across the Muslim world.

6

In this context, the Scientific Council for Government Policy's report entitled *The European Union, Turkey and Islam*, is important. In this report we addressed the question whether the fact that the majority of its population is Muslim forms a hindrance to Turkey's accession to the European Union. We have taken on this project certainly not because we feel that Turkey should somehow be judged according to standards other than the EU's Copenhagen criteria. After all, it is a fact that at the European Council of Helsinki (1999) the European heads of government committed themselves to Turkey's candidacy for membership. And it is also a fact that a European Union committed to the principles of the secular constitutional state cannot exclude a European country on the basis of its dominant religion. For these reasons, we felt that the final decision on Turkish membership negotiations should not be 'polluted' by misunderstandings about Islam.

The answer to our central question was crystal clear: Turkish Islam is *not* a hindrance to Turkey's EU accession. During the Dutch chairmanship of the European Union (EU), the EU decided to open membership negotiations with candidate member state Turkey. The EU has committed itself to assessing Turkey's membership using the same procedures it applies, and has applied, to other candidate

member states. That fact that Turkey is a country with a predominantly Muslim population certainly presents the EU with a unique situation. After all, the Christian faith is the dominant religion in the present member states as well as in the other candidate countries. The political agenda throughout Europe reveals a huge gulf between the broad public debate on 'Islam' and Muslim fundamentalism, on the one hand, and the discussion among European experts and academics on the authoritarian, secular character of the Turkish state, on the other. The former usually is mirrored in platitudes about Islam, Muslims, violence and fundamentalism. Platitudes which do scant justice to the characteristics of Turkish Islam, culture and society. The second debate brings together two different perspectives; one stressing the partiality of the guarantees that Turkey offers for the protection of individuals and (religious) minority groups; the other emphasising the opportunity afforded for the EU, via Turkish membership, to build a bridge to the Islamic world. Both debates form parts of a wider and more complex issue, namely Turkey's search for a new balance between religion, state and society in a rapidly changing environment. How this search develops, and more particularly which opportunities and threats Turkey will meet en route, are directly relevant to the question whether Islamic Turkey is compatible with membership of the EU. Indirectly, the question is also highly relevant for Europe's relationship with the Islamic world.

Misunderstandings, however, remain about Islam and Muslims that also impinge on the debate on Turkish Islam and Turkish Muslims, including those that live in the Netherlands. For instance, many people believe that Muslims are (potentially violent) fundamentalists who are keen to establish a theocracy and Shari'a law. The examples of Sudan, Pakistan and Iran illustrate what this means for democracy and human rights. So why still focus on Turkish Islam in its own right? Why not concentrate on the formal accession requirements? We felt it necessary to do so because the wider public debate outside 'Brussels', in countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and so on will not be restricted to the Copenhagen criteria. Already, there is a wide rift between EU watchers (who understandably focus on these formal criteria)

and the broader public on the issue of Turkey. Many people are worried about Turkey's 'Islam factor'. If and when an accession treaty is signed, it will require ratification, either by national parliaments or by popular referenda. We strongly believe that this ratification process should be based on an informed overall judgement by the European populations, and one that includes knowledge of Turkish Islam and Turkish Muslims. Therefore, we have addressed these issues explicitly, and we hope this will eventually contribute to a well-informed European public debate on Turkish accession.

8

Although the religion-factor plays only a limited role in this assessment, it is precisely this factor that has generated so much disquiet. Not only in the EU member states, but also in Turkey, public and political manifestations of Islam have raised controversy. Evidence for this can be found in the countless 'headscarf incidents' in Turkey, as well as in the periodic interventions by the Turkish army against democratically elected leaders with overt religious affiliations. Many supporters of Turkish nationalist and secular parties fear that it is precisely the religious fundamentalists who would be given free reign should the military, as a result of EU pressure, be processed to withdraw completely from politics. They are wary of demands by the European Parliament that Turkey should adopt a 'more relaxed position' towards Islam in particular and religion in general. Other groups, too, such as emancipated young women, atheist and gays, distrust the current government of the moderately religious AK Party, and expect that, at any moment, it will show its 'true anti-secularist' colours.

According to the principles of the Treaties, the EU is a union founded on the political and civic values of the democratic constitutional state. These minimum values contain two crucial assumptions, relating to the position of religion in (future) member states: the separation of the state and religion and the guarantee of religious freedoms and rights. Defining exactly what this entails is much less easy, given the widely divergent relations between state, religion and society among member states. There is no agreed European standard that goes beyond these minimum values, and no

single model that the EU could offer Turkey. Freedom of religion therefore forms a major demand of Islamic political parties. The law and the legal system are based on the same secular principles as those of EU member states.

In its report, the WRR considers the chance of an attack on the democratic rule of law to be remote because of the broad popular support for membership of the Union, a dislike among Turks of religious intolerance and the sociological processes that form the basis of political Islam. The Turkish electorate has regularly expressed its preference for moderate parties and appears to have abandoned a more radical Islamic orientation, support for which was anyway always limited. The purifying effect of democracy applies just as much to Turkey as to other countries. From a sociological standpoint, the preference for moderation is not only an expression of ideas, but also of interests and the large middle class has a great economic interest in accession to the EU.

9

As we argue in our report, the Turkish constitution and the state apparatus strictly protect the state's autonomy towards religious communities. This situation did not emerge overnight. It is the outcome of a long process of secular state-building that began long before the creation of the Turkish Republic under Kemal Atatürk. His reforms can be seen as the tailpiece of more than a century of profound changes. These largely mirrored changes in Europe were based on domestic choices rather than external forces and were supported by the forces of Islam. As in Europe, they were heavily inspired by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Thus, the 19th century witnessed the end of absolute rule, the introduction of a constitution and the advent of parliamentary elections. Large parts of the Swiss civil code were imported, traditional Shari'a punishments were formally abolished (1858) and in 1924 the few remainders of Islamic law were removed. It is no coincidence that when Atatürk introduced a very rigorous separation of state and religion under the new Turkish Republic, he was actually inspired by France's system of *laïcité*. Both France and Turkey periodically experience heated debates on the wearing of headscarves in public spaces which move on rather similar constitutional territories.

These examples also illustrate that Turkey is not as different as it is often made out to be.

This brings me to the rise of Islam-inspired political parties and the position of the ruling AK party. Do these developments represent a danger to Turkey's secular state? We do not think so. Islam as a *politically* relevant phenomenon should be seen in the context of its forced marginalizing in the previous decades. Until recently, Islamic parties were met by profound distrust from the establishment in and around governmental institutions, who identify strongly with Kemalist thinking. Both the Constitutional Court and the armed forces have intervened on several occasions and banned such parties. This denial of Islamic identity by the upper classes was never shared by the population at large. Its emergence was underpinned by important socio-economic changes in Turkey, such as the rise of a substantial middle class in rural areas and in the smaller towns, for whom Islam constitutes a normal part of everyday life.

10

Islam-inspired political parties such as those of Necmettin Erbakan have never attracted more than 21 per cent of the Turkish electorate. Nor have they contested the secular nature of the democratic state. Rather, by insisting on the individual's freedom of religion and opposing strong government controls on religious communities, they have advocated a different type of secularism than that contained in Kemalist state ideology. While supporting the existing democratic system, moreover, they have fought to make it accessible to religiously inspired political parties. The current governing AK Party is still more explicit on this human rights based secularism. It considers differences in religion, culture and opinion as an enrichment of society, and secularism as one principle of freedom which allows for genuine pluralism. Its concept of human rights is inclusive, by explicitly discussing the equal rights of non-believers. Moreover, it is aware that these concepts, and the measures to implement them, are not simply means of obtaining an EU entry ticket, but are actually essential for the country's further democratisation and modernisation. For example, the current government, supported by the women's movement, has led the attack both on

the formal and actual discrimination against women and girls, and on the still frequent use of violence (honour killings) against them. This subject has been taboo until now, also because those involved justified 'traditional behaviour' by referring to Islam. These traditions, however, are not restricted to Muslims; they can also be found in Christian Mediterranean countries.

Does all this imply that Islam in Turkey is wholly unproblematic for the EU? We cannot deny there are different problems to overcome, but not in the sense of a dominant Islamic influence on the state. Rather the opposite is true; the state's control over Turkish Islam is too large. Turkey has a form of state-Islam that is supervised by a state body, the Directorate for Religious Affairs (or Diyanet). Since 1982, its messages have combined a strong emphasis on social conservatism and nationalism with a moderate Islam which is mainly propagated through compulsory lessons in religion and ethics and state-controlled radio and television. As a result, the state not merely provides institutional support for one specific religion; it is also actively involved in the substance of religion. There is no doubt that these arrangements create tensions with the freedom of religion. After all, this basic principle assumes that the state respects the autonomy of religious communities and guarantees that religious believers (and atheists and apostates) face no restrictions in the exercise of their rights.

Various arguments can be given for the expectation that the secular democratic rule of law in Turkey will not be endangered should its self-proclaimed 'guardians' withdraw, though the gradual increase in freedom will initially result in a much broader range of opinions and create greater contrasts than exist in the current controlled democracy. The period between starting accession negotiations and the actual accession itself may still take many years, but nonetheless it offers Turkey the chance gradually to become further accustomed to European practices. Once Turkey's accession becomes a fact, one cannot exclude the possibility that new situations may arise that will threaten the democratic constitutional state, for example a renewed coup. This danger, however, does not only apply to Turkey. Since many of the new member states have only recently

converted to democracy, the danger has certainly not become smaller. The Union has proven in earlier conflicts that it is able to formulate rules to handle this. New types of conflicts may force it to do this again. As long as the legislation and its implementation comply with the ECHR, the EU has few other grounds for calling the Turkish state to account for these wrongful practices. It is all the more important, therefore, that the Islamic aspects of these practices are debated in Turkey itself and – as is happening now – that Muslims themselves condemn these practises. Those of the opinion that Islam orders these practices will obviously also speak out. This, too, is important.

12

Rather than simply condemning this situation, EU member states should also put it into perspective. While Turkey needs to reform its arrangements in the run-up to EU accession, it is equally worth remembering that many current member states do not all observe 'strict neutrality' towards religion and religious denominations either. The relations between European states and religions reveal a much more complex picture. Some have a formal state church, others have created *de facto* privileged positions for some denominations, for instance by granting one denomination the monopoly on religious education in state schools. Such diverse national arrangements often reflect the complexities of divergent, historically rooted relations between religion, state and society. There is thus no unambiguous or fixed European standard against which Turkey can be judged. Nor are there *a priori* reasons to assume that Turkey would not be able to conform with the EU's minimum standards on the freedom of religion and the autonomy of state and religion.

Finally, to say that Turkey *can* join is not to argue that Turkey also *should* join to avoid all kinds of backlashes within Turkey itself or within the Muslim world. Turkey can only really be made to feel welcome if it joins the EU irrespective of Islam. Only then would it send out a clear signal that the West and the Muslim world are not on an irreversible collision course. Unfortunately, such a signal is sorely needed nowadays.

This little booklet is trying to support such a signal for an informed debate by publishing the lectures given by Fuller and Kurpershoek. The council hopes to contribute, with this publication, to the informed debate we do so badly need.

Wim van de Donk
Chairman WRR

NOTE

- 1 Already some two years ago, the WRR decided to place the theme of political Islam on its new working programme. In June 2004, the Council presented the first results of its research, with the publication of a report to the government entitled *The European Union, Turkey and Islam*. A second, and more wide-ranging report on political Islam is currently in preparation, and we intend to present the results of that research by the end of 2005.

POLITICAL ISLAM IN ACTION

Graham Fuller

It is a great pleasure for me to be here to talk to you, particularly because I think the European approach to Islamic problems is a unique one. It differs from the issues that we face in the United States in some ways, and I have great hopes for the ability of Europe itself to play a major role in beginning to cope with this very serious problem that we have ahead of us.

Let me begin by saying that I am not an academic in all senses of the word. I have studied many things, but I have also served as a diplomat and as a CIA officer for many years in the Middle East. I make this point because I want to make clear that this is not strictly an academic view, but a view at least with some experience in the Middle East. I have lived in the Middle East for seventeen years in various countries, which I continue to visit on a regular basis. My most recent book, *The future of political Islam*, really came out of a long series of interviews and five years of talking to Islamists all over the world. From the United States to United Kingdom, Europe, the Arab world, Pakistan, India and Indonesia. But I am still struggling with this topic. I do not think anyone has complete answers to this question to this question: what is political Islam and where it is headed? I have some ideas, and I will share these, but there are no clear-cut answers because it is a very complicated problem.

First, when we talk about political Islam, let me start with a definition. In my view, political Islam refers to anyone Muslim who believes that the *Quran* and the tradition of the prophet, in other words the *Hadiff*, have important things to say for Islamic governments and society. They believe that they must try to implement this in some way. Although they do not agree on how this should be implemented or what all those important things might be, nonetheless there is an attempt to implement some of these ideas.

It becomes clear that political Islam consists of a very broad spectrum. My first major point is that when we are discussing the problems of Islam and the West (although there is no such thing as the Islam in one meaning, or the West in one meaning), I do not think we are talking about religion, primarily. The issue is not about Jesus Christ and the prophet Muhammed. Instead, I argue that the questions of tension between the Muslim world and the West and political Islam have to do with very specific concrete grievances, fantasies, objective facts, historical experiences and ambitions, both in the Muslim world and in the West. I say this because we talk about the Islam and the West as very abstract concepts, and we cannot feel the clash of civilisations which emerges from this. We cannot solve a problem of clash of civilisations. But we can if we break down the nature of this confrontation. If we break it down into component parts, then it begins to be possible to manage the conflict between these two sides.

16

A key argument in my book and in my general approach to the problem is to think of political Islam not so much as a religious movement, but as a vehicle for many different phenomena. Of course political Islam is partly about religion. There is a Greek renaissance of Islamic thinking in the Middle East and in the Muslim world, indeed in the Christian world. I do not need to remind anyone about the role Christian activists played in the last election in the United States. In Israel and India there are also growing issues of religious belief. Islam is not unique in this respect. But political Islam especially serves as a vehicle for many other goals. I will explore some of these. First of all, political Islam helps Muslims to establish a clear identity. Islam for them can be a symbol of unity, of solidarity, of pride, as to who they were and where they want to go. So in this sense everyone will be comfortable with the symbolism and identity of Islam as a key force of identity. But beyond that, political Islam also provides an excellent basis of critique for contemporary Muslim governments and regimes. I would have to say, frankly, that I think that there are very few good legitimate regimes across much of the Middle East. Most of them are dictatorships to one degree or another, few of them are elected, few of them enjoy full public support, few of them could win elections if they

were asked to run for office, many of them are not fully competent, many of them are corrupt, and in most cases, people are not able to get rid of the leaders who are heading these regimes. Political Islam provides a very good critique of these regimes; it criticizes their absence of legitimacy and in Islamic or Western terms criticizes corruption. It has a stronger basis for critique than it would have simply to talk about the problem in Western terms such as democracy or human rights. It is possible to talk about that, but Islamic critique is especially effective and is feared by many Muslim regimes in power today. Secondly, political Islam is also a powerful moral argument against imperialism and especially Western imperialism. I do not need to tell anyone from Europe, coming from one of the long traditions of colonialism and imperialism (whichever you choose to call it), about the long tradition of European colonialism. Today we see a different form, what many would call neo-imperialism of America, interventionism and domination in the region. Political Islam provides a sharp critique of this foreign imperial force and tries to organise resistance to it.

17

Finally, political Islam serves as a moral compass for Muslims in times of trouble and uncertainty. The world is changing everywhere. Even outside the Muslim world there is a craving, a desire for moral clarity: 'What is happening in the world, where are we going, what is happening to society, where are our values?' This is not unique to the Muslim world. It is a global phenomenon, but political Islam speaks in this way. Today, whether we like it or not, political Islam is the number one force of opposition across the Muslim world to entrench regimes. There is no other movement that begins to rival political Islam. Not Arab nationalism or local nationalisms, not Marxism or Leninism. Not even liberal democracy, which would be my preferred political outlook. There are a number of people who profess liberal democracy in the Muslim world, but you can count them in very small numbers in those societies today.

A third point is that political Islam is not a monolithic, single movement. We cannot say political Islam is X, Y or Z in one phrase. This is a broad spectrum. I defined it earlier as anyone who believes that

the Quran and the traditions of the prophet have something important to say about governance and society in the Muslim world. But this is a very broad definition. Is Osama Bin Laden an Islamist? Yes, he is, according to my definition, but on a very extreme edge. He has not only a radical vision, but also a violent vision. But there are others who are very radical in their vision but not violent. And there are others who are more moderate, such as the Muslim brotherhood which in most places is non-violent, and has a less radical vision of the world. And then you even have today, in Turkey, a party in power which, if it cannot be called Islamist, can be seen as just having emerged out of an Islamist movement. Someone from Turkey might take objection to my characterisation of the Turkey party as Islamist, but most people in that party came out of strong Islamist tradition. And now they want to join the European Union. They want to have more civil liberties, more greater democratisation in the country, and they would want relaxation of anti-religious discrimination as they would see it, for example, whether you can wear a head-scarf or not. But this is on the extremely moderate side of political Islam. I emphasise this, because we cannot just say: 'political Islam is the bad guys'. There are many parties and movements that are evolving. This is not monolithic, it is also not static. It is dynamic, it is shifting, it is changing, it is learning, it is evolving. Sometimes it is going in the wrong direction in my view, but usually towards a direction of moderation as they gain experience, public exposure, knowledge about the world, generational change and all of these things. Therefore it is not just the bad-news violent types, but also the move towards moderation, in which Turkey is a key model today.

18

A fourth key point is that in my view political Islam or elements of political Islam are capable of evolving toward democracy and sometimes universal political values. By saying that they are capable I do not mean that they have all moved in that direction. Certainly the Islamic party in Turkey today, the AKP party, has clearly moved in that direction. Other parties are struggling to do so, but often have not had the opportunity because they have been banned and forbidden. In Egypt there is a party called *Hizb al-Wasat*, the party of the middle. This party has broken away from the Muslim brotherhood

and now talks about the need to bring Christian Copts into the party, to emphasise even more the role of women in the party, to have an agenda working with Europe. And the Egyptian governments has simply said no to this party. They do not want a moderate Islamic party. They would prefer, perhaps, an Islamic party that is less moderate so you can criticize it and attack it, and use it to scare others. I do not want to single out Egypt alone as the problem, because in a lot of ways Egypt has done well in this respect, but I think this is one case of a very poor government decision: to close down very encouraging developments among Islamists. Egypt could move towards what we see in Turkey today. I would say if political Islam is capable of this kind of evolution, we need, where possible, to assist moderate parties into actually taking some responsibility within power. Then they can learn from the process. If there is one political Islamist party I would like to see three Islamist parties in the country. Because there is no single truth, and the parties do not agree with each other. There is no agreement on many basic issues among these Islamists groups. Therefore I would like to see debate among them. If you call yourself, for example, *Hizbullah*, party of God, you are putting other parties at a disadvantage. What then are the other Islamic parties? Are they the *Hizbasheitan*, the party of the devil? We need to contain this process of diversification among Islamist parties. Even when we talk about Shari'a law, the traditional body of Muslim jurisprudence, there is no agreement about what constitutes Shari'a law, or how it should be interpreted, and how it should be applied. This is not just today, throughout Muslim history there has been picking and choosing by different Muslim governments, as to how the Shari'a should be applied. And even today, in Iran, which prides itself on being super-Islam, Shari'a law has been contradicted in many respects where it is simply not convenient for them to continue in the old way. An example of this is the law of divorce. They simply have not accepted this law. That is why we should not get into the question as some Orientalists like to do in the West, and say: I have studied the text, and it is clear that if you read this, it is impossible for Islamic movements to become moderate or to accept democracy or pluralism. I do not go by the text, and Muslims do not go by the texts in most cases in deciding what they want. If

they feel that democracy is appropriate for them they will find reason within Islam to do this. Islam is like other religions in this respect also, you can find what you want within these texts. It is possible to find language that refers to periods of violence and struggle in the prophet's early community, very harsh language about the enemies of the very early Islamic community, which was under siege from other parts of the *Hijaz* in Saudi Arabia. But other magnificent lines can be found that suggest humanity and a sense of pluralism and understanding and treatment of people, lines which show a God who cares and is loving. In the Old Testament the same thing can be found. There is frightening language in the Old Testament about what the punishing God will do to you, and what this tribe will do to that tribe, language of hatred and lack of tolerance. But there are other magnificent lines of understanding and tolerance that are an inspiration for all human beings. Similarly, in Christianity we see Christian texts and beliefs used for unspeakable purposes at certain times, and at other times magnificent. So when anybody quotes a text to you to prove that Islam is this or that, it should not be accepted. It is possible to find alternative texts in other directions. Today the reformation of Islam, the change of human understanding of Islam, is moving in many interesting directions. As some Islamist liberals say: you do not look at the packing, but you look at the content of a certain phrase. Yes, the prophet said X, Y or Z. But what was the problem he was discussing and examining? And how did he reach this conclusion, and why did he reach this conclusion for that specific occasion? These Islamic liberals would say: we have to take the spirit of prophet. If he were here today, how would he take a different problem and apply this principle to contemporary conditions? And that is where the nature of Islamic change can be seen. This is why my fourth point is that political Islam, or large parts of the spectrum, is capable of change and that we see change in many areas. I find this very encouraging.

However, my fifth, sixth and seventh points are about contemporary international conditions. This is a code phrase for the mess in the Middle East today as a result of the attack of 9/11 and the US response with the global war on terrorism, the war in Iraq and the Israeli problem that is constantly getting worse. There are many

other problems but I will talk about these in particular. The result is that the international conditions are very negative for the development of a liberal understanding of Islam. This is not limited to just Islam. I argue that liberalism and liberal approach and understanding to problems after 9/11 has changed in many places. In the US, I think that there is a less liberal atmosphere today than has existed throughout most of my lifetime. In Europe there is some degree of new caution that has emerged as a result of these problems. Certainly in the Muslim world today, Muslims see themselves as under siege and under attack from all sides. And therefore they are not in any mood for how to open up, how to be more generous and liberal in their understanding. This is for them a question of existence, self-preservation and preservation of culture. And they feel under siege from all sides. The conditions are not good in the Muslim world, and the conditions are not good in Israel. Israel does have a problem of terrorism and as a result of this, many of the magnificent liberal voices within Israel tend to be rather quiet today for the same reasons. They are facing pressures and violence. Many regimes across the Muslim world and beyond are cracking down, taking advantage of the 9/11 incident. Russia sees this, for Russians Chechnya is part of international terrorism. It does not matter that the Chechnyans have been fighting two hundred years for independence, today it is part of the struggle against terrorism. Chinese are seeing the Uygur Muslim Turks in western China, 8 million people, as now part of the war against terrorism. Israel speaks of the Palestinian problem as now part of the international war against terrorism. That is why this is not a good time for the liberal opening up of Islam and trying to understand it. And if I, as coming from a Christian background, believe we can tell Muslims: 'this is how you can understand Islam' or 'this is what Islam really is', I will be rejected immediately, because people under pressure resent outsiders telling them what their religion is all about. Whether they agree or do not agree, it is not a good time for openness. The war against terrorism has brought some very encouraging change in Afghanistan. However, I believe the war in Iraq has been an utter disaster and it has intensified and polarised the Muslim world more than almost anything has in the recent years. And the situation is continuing to get worse. I believe that today it will be very difficult

to wipe up the residue of problems that have been created inside Iraq. It is wonderful that Saddam Hussein is gone, but the fact is that the Muslim world has been very polarised by these events and continues to be more polarised every single day. Terrorism that did not exist in Iraq now finds very fertile ground. If America has been able to find and kill, arrest or otherwise eliminate hundreds of actual and potential terrorists, I would argue that perhaps five to ten times those numbers have been recreated anew from younger generations who keep coming forward in greater numbers. They now see the war in Iraq as the moral equivalent of the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. They saw the war in Afghanistan as a sensational triumph for Islam against a superpower. Many even said at the time: the Islam has defeated a superpower. That same mentality is now working in thought towards the presence of US occupation today in Iraq. I am very negative about these conditions and the damage it will do to potential liberal developments within Islam. I think we clearly have to continue the struggle against terrorism. I think the war against terrorism is a very unfortunate phrase, because essentially military means are not the appropriate way to end almost all the problems of terrorism today. This is done by intelligence and police work, and police cooperation. Sadly, we do not get as much cooperation today as we should because the diplomacy has not been adequate to encourage this kind of international cooperation and sympathy.

My eighth point would be that when we are looking for solutions to violence and sources of radicalism in the Middle East we must look at the Palestinian problem as well. This must urgently be solved. We cannot wait any longer; the US has had more than twenty years to work on this problem with an almost exclusive monopoly. It has failed. The situation today is arguably worse from every possible point of view. And I therefore hope that other players will begin to participate and remove the purely American monopoly on the problem. I say this with much regret because I had a great deal of faith in Washington's ability to bring some sort of solution in past years. But that has disappeared completely and we seriously need external independent players to bring some kind of solution where we cannot. I believe that the essence of the problem in Palestine is

the thirty-five years of occupation. There is without a doubt a serious terrorism problem for Israel. But if we want to begin to begin to untie this complex knot with interactive features, we must begin by ending 35 years of harsh occupation. Otherwise there is no possibility of beginning to solve the issue.

I anticipated my last point a while ago; today we face not only the problems in the Middle East but also problems of Muslims in the West. And these problems differ. Sometimes they are all bunched together under one heading of Islam or Muslims. I think that is incorrect, there is a variety of problems here. For example, we have problems with immigration in general, we have problems of multiculturalism in general, we have problems of differing Muslim cultures in general, and we have problems of Muslim class; whether they are professional classes as they tend to be in the US, or working class as they tend to be in the Netherlands and Germany, at least in the past. There are many different aspects of this problem that need examination, more than simply to talk about Islam or Muslims or Muslim immigration. This does not clarify the problem, and it is a little bit Huntingtonian in its approach. We now have the issues of the Muslims in the West. I think this could potentially be a very encouraging and positive move. Muslims in the West, in Europe and in North-America, are having remarkable opportunities to think and write more freely, free of their own crushing societies back where they came from. If this provides opportunity to think about Islam in more pure religious or theological terms, then it would be back home where religion is sometimes confused and mixed in with tradition, tribal culture or other things that really do not deal with Islam.

I am hopeful in the long run that Islam is in the end not greatly different from any other religion. It is still facing questions of change, of evolution, and there is a great deal of thinking going on, but the international conditions at present are extremely bad for the solution of these issues. That is not to say that it cannot be done, but Muslims today feel very much under siege, under attack everywhere. People often ask the question: Muslims have grievances, but so do other people in the world, in Africa or Latin America, and

they are not having a huge Jihad or huge movements. I do point out that what is unique about the Muslim world is that its very strength is part of the problem. This is a long, very rich, very successful historical experience. Of fourteen hundred years of power, of governments, of states, of laws, of philosophy, of civilisation. It is very broad and Muslims are aware of themselves in this connection as being part of the Muslim Umma, the totality of the Muslim condition. Today Muslims see themselves as under siege, particularly Muslim minorities, but it is not just that Bosnians are perhaps being killed because they are Muslim, but Bosnians see Chechnyans being killed, and Chechnyans see Palestinians being killed, and Palestinians see Kashmirians being killed. And Kashmiries see Moro's in the Philippines being killed. Today there is a new problem emerging in Southern Thailand with a Muslim minority (that is essentially Malay speaking and properly speaking belongs to Malaysia in a cultural sense) in an underdeveloped region as it has been ignored by the Thai government. Today these young men have been watching television, and they have been watching the war in Iraq, and they are saying: 'That is us!' They see themselves. There is this echo effect, across the Muslim world. It is possible to see on television what is happening to other Muslims. And this intensifies the feeling that would not be the case if it was simply Rwandans. Because their ethnic or religious links to Rwanda are very weak. I am just suggesting why this is reaching such a crescendo, and the very intensity and success of Islamic civilisation in the past contributes now to some of this resistance and determination to defend Islam and strengthen Islam, in any way. Whether it means through intellectual work and progress or whether it means grabbing a rifle and going on a Jihad.

In conclusion, I am generally optimistic in the much longer run about the ability of the Islam to work through these things, but we must have awareness of the complexity of these things going on within these movements, and we need in particular Europe's acting involvement. I would like to see a Europe working independently of the United States today, simply because the United States bears a terrible burden, and that terrible burden is to be the world's only superpower. Which means the US gets blamed for everything. And the US takes on everything as a result. At this point, unfortunately,

American credibility in the Middle East is at rock bottom, it is very difficult for the US to accomplish things even if they are done well. And the war in Iraq has not been done well, but even if it were done well, it would still be very difficult. So we need European independent cooperation, independent work under their own umbrella, and not as part of an American project that is now so discredited in Iraq and the regions around it. But I am optimistic that together with time we will pass through this stage and things will calm down.

WHAT FUTURE FOR POLITICAL ISLAM?

THE CATCH 22 OF POLITICAL ISLAM

Marcel Kurpershoek

Our subject is political Islam. Why? Why not spiritual, profound, meditative, divinely beautiful and compassionate Islam? Islamic politics: Is Islam a religion for modern man or a political ideology? Can it be both?

Disturbing questions, but they cannot be evaded. In many parts of the world Islam is and will remain a crucial part of identity. The struggle is about the *kind of Islam* that will define a country's culture and mental space. It is an undecided battle. The outcome will depend on many factors. Among them the policies the Western world is going to adopt and how they will be explained. Vice versa, developments in Muslim countries will continue to shape Western views and policies.

27

Sharp divisions exist and continue to grow. Non-Muslims in the Western world feel no sympathy for political Islam, no matter what definition is used. They see it as a threat.

Suppose experts agree that political Islam has a great future. This would worsen existing fears. For political Islam to find acceptance in the Western world it must demonstrate that it is *not* the enemy of equal religious and other human rights, cultural pluralism, and democratic freedoms. Political Islam must defend the right of the individual to make its own decisions within the bounds of secular laws. It *should* show itself the enemy of all kinds of violence and intimidation; the enemy of the lesser status and oppression of women and minorities in the public and private domain; the enemy of those who want to take the law into their own hands.

What are the chances? Let's admit it: not in the foreseeable future. Can political Islam develop a more humanist perspective? Today's discussions in political Islam hardly differ from what was said in

the 1920s and 1930s when Hasan al-Banna founded the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. We hear the same discourse of Western materialism, exploitation of women, immorality, the role of Jihad, and so on. How long is the wait going to be? The world cannot afford to wait a few more decades. The crisis is here and now.

In the Islamic world things are seen in a different light. Views are not uniform, but they are predictable. Supporters of political Islam argue, as they have always done, that Western societies are corrupt, immoral and doomed. They present Muslims as victims of racial and religious prejudice. Liberals in the Islamic world take heart as they see new opportunities to work for secularism and rule of law. But they remain a minority in a sea of traditionalism.

I'd like to make the following points.

28

- 1 *The conflict is not one between the West and the Islamic world as two blocs. The conflict is about the geography of the mind, not any physical kind of geography. Battle lines are global. Allies can be found anywhere. For instance, liberals in Pakistan and liberals in the Netherlands. Islamic extremists in Pakistan and extremists in the Netherlands.*
- 2 *Islam, as a religious culture, must be separated from political Islam as an ideology – an ideology that translates social frustration into hostility to Western values. A dialogue with Islam hardly makes sense. There is no Islamic Pope. The danger is that it confirms political Islam as the spokesman for Muslims, which it is not. And who will speak for the other side: Christians, Buddhists, humanists, liberals, socialists, or governments? There should be contacts with citizens of nations where Muslims are a majority or minority. But these contacts should be on international issues, human rights, democracy, and so on – as in contacts with countries like Ukraine, Serbia, Uganda, or Sri Lanka. Labelling things as 'Islamic' will play into the hands of supporters of political Islam and their project of a separate global identity. If Islamic political ideology spawns violence, it must be discredited and isolated, as any other violent ideology.*
- 3 *Muslims suffer most from political and jihadi Islam. Confusion of brand names adds to their plight. If a good and a bad brand*

are combined the bad brand wins. It is easier to spoil something good than to sell something bad. Let's take cola as an example. Coca-Cola is a good kind of cola. Islamic Cola might also be good cola. But it would not be popular in the world market, because political Islam is seen as a bad brand. It might get a monopoly in a closed, ideological market, like that of an Islamic country. Still people would secretly crave for Coca-Cola. The same in politics. A democratic state is a good kind of state. In theory an Islamic state might also be a good state. But it has a bad name. It can be imposed in a closed culture. Still people would crave for a democratic state. In all cases the loser is Islam as a religion. It might be a good religion, but if it is linked with bad politics the good loses out to the bad. *Political Islam hurts the interests of Muslims on two accounts: because of the damage it does to their religion and because they are denied access to good political brands.*

- 4 Most Muslims would prefer to practise their religion quietly and vote for parties that serve their worldly interests best. Political Islam claims, against historical evidence, that Islam is state and religion. For political Islam, with its supporters in the State and the clergy, the sacred is an excuse for oppression, intimidation, and the stifling of debate. It makes one reread Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (for instance on the paradox of tolerance: the right, in the name of tolerance, not to tolerate the intolerant). *Muslims and non-Muslims must be protected from the hijacking of religion for violent political purposes. The obvious remedy is the application of universal standards and erecting a firewall between the sacred domain and the civil organisation of society.*

This offers a general approach. Realities on the ground are diverse and complex. Pakistan and the Arab Middle East are the areas where we find the breeding ground for the ideological virus of political Islam. It has inflamed the area. From this arc of crisis it has been exported to East Asia, Africa and Europe. At the crossroads of the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East, Pakistan is a good example. It has an Islamic superego heavily influenced by the Arab Middle East. But its popular subconscious of saint worship is Indian. Pakistan is not directly involved in the Middle East conflicts

that fuel the fires of political Islam. It is obsessed with India and Kashmir. Not with Sykes and Picot, the dividers of the Ottoman Middle East, but with Mountbatten, who partitioned British India.

With more than 150 million inhabitants it is the second largest Muslim nation. It has been created in the name of Islam. Yet Pakistan's thinking elite is aware that there is a problematic side to this distinction. The country is plagued by sectarian violence, intolerance and terrorism carried out in the name of Islam. Since 9/11 Pakistan has moved to improve relations with India and clamped down on extremists. It may involve a change of identity: from an angry, intolerant, militant mentality to a democratic, pluralist society. A society in which Islam is not an ideological caricature, but draws on its rich and subtle Indian history. If successful, this would remove a major source of ideological proliferation. It would also set a powerful example and create an anchor of institutional stability at the eastern borders of the Middle East, as Turkey does in the West.

30

The Example of Pakistan: Origins of Political Islam

Pakistan is part of South Asia and former British India, which is home to more than 400 million Muslims, by far the largest number in the world. It has a complex history of communal strife and peaceful co-existence, of uncompromising orthodoxy and creative, liberal thought. The challenge for Pakistan, now and before, is the secular, pluralist and democratic model of India. In the 1980s intolerant Islam gained the upper hand due to the military dictatorship of Zia ul-Haq, the Jihad in Afghanistan and Wahhabi interpretations riding on a tidal wave of petrodollars. Religious extremism became Pakistan's most significant export item. The country and the entire world have suffered the consequences.

Much of the money went to *madrasa's*, religious seminars. I visited a number of them, in Quetta, the heart of Taliban country in Pakistan, and elsewhere. From the outside one hears a sound like the buzz of a huge beehive or hornet's nest. Inside boys, looking drawn and none of them happy or laughing, are seen moving their upper body back and forth over a copy of the Quran. They are

memorising the Holy Book of Islam. Yet they cannot write a letter even in their own national language, Urdu. Let alone that they would understand Arabic. Let alone that they would understand the difficult ancient kind of Arabic in which the Quran has been written. Let alone that they would be able to understand the Quran in a way that makes sense in today's world.

This sight I find deeply troubling. It is not poverty as such. Education offers a bridge to a better life. The sad thing is that whatever potential these kids have is being broken in the bud. Their brains are crammed with stuff they have no way of coping intellectually with. It is the fast lane to make them accept doctrine and authority without question. During the Afghan war these seminaries became factories that churned out fighters ready to die in the war against unbelievers. Now what will happen with hundreds of thousands of unemployed brainwashed students? No one knows.

31

The public school system is hardly better. A recent study has shown that it teaches children to love Jihad and to seek martyrdom. Government schools breed hatred, intolerance, and a distorted view of the world. Perhaps one must be grateful that the system did not perform better than it did. Still it is a fact that most of the jihadis have a background in government schools.

A former minister of education made an attempt to improve the curriculum of government schools. The religious parties attacked her. It was called a sell-out of the country's Islamic ideology. No mention was made of the relation between education and the fact that Pakistan is sliding ever deeper into poverty. Or that illiteracy among women is about 70 percent. Making education less ideological is seen by the mullah parties as an attempt to loosen their grip on the country's spirit. Under pressure the minister backtracked and declared: 'I am a Muslim and a fundamentalist and cannot think of deleting Islamic concepts from the textbooks.'

Fear is a factor – fear of social ostracism and righteous violence. Until recently it was not politically correct to question the concepts of Jihad and martyrdom. The official motto of the army is 'Jihad on

the way of Allah'. Yet times are changing. The marshes of Jihad in Afghanistan and Kashmir are drying up. Borders are being defined. President Musharraf has stated that the real enemies are the extremists within and he advocates a moderate, enlightened version of Islam.

The dilemma faced by Musharraf arose at the partition of British India in 1947. Is Pakistan a country with a Muslim majority or an Islamic state? The difference is crucial. It is the difference between having a state religion, as in Bangla Desh, or being a religious state.

Pakistan was not planned as a religious state. The founding father of the country, Jinnah, was a chain-smoking, gin-and-tonic drinking lawyer in smart suits, and a barrister in London. He had little patience for religious scholars. The religious scholars reciprocated: they were against the creation of Pakistan. They called Jinnah not by his honorific 'The Great Leader' but 'The Great Unbeliever'. Jinnah's wife was Parsi. She was beautiful and extravagant. The wife of the British governor of Bombay was shocked when she appeared at dinner in a low-cut Parisian evening dress. She was brought a wrap, with the excuse that she might feel cold. Jinnah was a secularist, but he did not like being treated in a patronising way by Gandhi. He wanted his own country, a country with a majority of Muslims belonging to different schools of thought and religion, with equal rights for everyone. It would also have been a democracy, for in a pluralist society democracy comes naturally.

That was not to be. A few months after Jinnah's death the Constituent Assembly adopted a resolution saying that sovereignty belonged to Allah. Everything had to be decided in the light of the Quran and the Sunnah. Jinnah was sidelined by one of the founding fathers of political Islam, Mawdudi. His creation was the Jamaat-i Islami, a party that has branched out all over the world.

In Mawdudi's view Pakistan was insufficiently Islamic. The people were Muslim, but imperfect Muslims in their personal lives and in government. He wanted Pakistan to become a shining model of an Islamic society. Mawdudi saw himself as a revolutionary. For

centuries Muslims quietly followed religious practices in order to gain admission to Paradise, as promised by God in the Quran. As long as rulers did not interfere and protected the Muslims from the infidels and from chaotic conditions, that was enough. Actually, many traditions in Islam advise people against seeking political office. No one expected the rulers to create an Islamic utopia on earth. But political Islam does.

The Jamaat calls itself an ideological party. It wants to create a new society and a new man: the Homo Islamicus, as the Soviet system laboured to bring forth the Homo Sovieticus. It was not sufficient for Homo Islamicus to pray five times a day and observe the other pillars of Islam. As a Marxist works for socialist society, the Homo Islamicus should bring about a truly Islamic society. Beyond looms the magnificent vision of restored Islamic glory – an Islamic empire. For Allah has said that he will make his community victorious over all nations. And the rapid expansion of Islam in the early centuries was assisted by conquest.

33

The Jamaat claims Islam as an ideology that covers all aspects of life. The dictates of the Creator must be obeyed from the inner world of the soul to the most remote corner of civilisation. Society must be organised according to the Law of Allah, the Shari'a. In practice salvation of souls is a lesser concern for political Islam. Mawdudi wanted to gain power by the strength of ideas and, if possible, by democratic means. In this he was disappointed. *There never was a massive popular vote in favour of the Jamaat's utopian ideas.* Homo Islamicus did not seem to exist outside the Jamaat. But the Jamaat found support from political leaders looking for Islamic legitimacy. Its ideology was useful to the political establishment. For example, the Jamaat's programme on defence is 'to develop it to the maximum, including nuclear deterrence'.

The Jamaat teamed up with Zia ul-Haq, the pious military dictator who used jihadi groups and religious organisations as surrogate forces in warfare. The Jamaat was given charge of the curriculum wing of the Education ministry – an excellent instrument to train the new generation as Homo Islamicus. It also succeeded in politi-

cising the leaders of the traditional religious schools. The ideological seeds planted by the Jamaat found their way into the Islamic mainstream. Violent offshoots created an international network of jihadi groups and ideas, with funding and encouragement from Islamic sympathisers. Deobandi and other institutions of learning became entangled with murderous sectarian groups, jihadi organisations, and al-Qaeda terrorists. It became difficult to distinguish between intolerant orthodoxy, political Islam, righteous violence and terrorism. In the name of Islam a monstrous Hydra had been created.

This is the legacy Musharraf inherited from Zia. Musharraf, who is an admirer of Atatürk, once used the word 'secular'. The outcry of the religious parties was immediate. To them 'secular' is the opposite of *dini*, religious, someone who has the right attitude in life. 'Secular' means 'unbeliever', 'immoral', 'apostasy'. They maintain that Pakistan was born of the 'two-nation theory': a nation for the Muslims and a nation for the Hindus. The Jamaat would not mind seeing the 120 million Muslims in India under Hindu Manu laws. That fits into their picture of the world as divided in two camps: one where Muslim fundamentalists are supreme and a camp of the unbelievers, both in perpetual war or at best in a state of truce. According to the Jamaat making Pakistan a secular state would call its existence into question.

When Musharraf tried to undo Zia's notorious Islamic laws he ran into similar problems. These laws are open to all kinds of abuse. For instance, thousands of women have been jailed for adultery while in truth they were raped or otherwise victimised. The blasphemy laws are mostly used to harass Ahmadi's, Christians or anyone one doesn't like. A Muslim professor was condemned to death for telling his students that the parents of the prophet Muhammad could not have been Muslims. After all Muhammad started getting his revelations only after his parents' death (in the end the professor was acquitted, but left the country for his safety). Over the last four years at least 2500 women have been murdered in honour killings – a number comparable with the number of people killed in the Israeli-Palestinian violence in the same period. In all these cases

so-called Islamic laws and customs are used for ends which have nothing to do with religion. The male Muslim majority suffers as well: Sunnis and Shia have been killing each other, with generous help from sponsors in Saudi Arabia and Iran, both countries ruled by religious principle.

It has been claimed that without Islam Pakistan cannot exist; the country will fall apart; the only tie that keeps people together is Islam, and so on. In fact, one could argue that it is the other way round. Authoritarian political Islam has been imposed on the people of Pakistan. Pakistanis never had an opportunity to work out a national identity based on their cultural and regional pluralism. Instead Islamic ideology and intolerance have stunted the country's development.

The Ideology of Political Islam

Those riding the bandwagon of political Islam proclaim that an Islamic state must be modelled on the theocracy established by Muhammad in Medina and on the period of the first four Caliphs. This is the *salafi* model, the way of the pious ancestors. They insist that what we call primitive must be seen as pure, and pure is good. Deviation from the primitive model is condemned as innovation. Innovation is bad because it leads away from the primitive model. This is the outlook of the Taliban and many religious groups in Pakistan.

The argument for a return to the original blueprint is simple. Muhammad was the last Prophet sent by God. His message is the only and eternal truth. Unlike most prophets he was given a chance to put the message into practice. His formula was tested in political reality. The name of his formula was the Quran. Its application is called Sunnah. This was the launching pad for Islamic glory. If it can be copied, the original success can be repeated.

It is a simplistic, dangerous formula. Under the guise of religious purity it will prune the human tree of its branches, its leaves, its birds and its bark. In the end the tree will be cut down and leave a bare ground where nothing will distract from the Tawhid: the

declaration that there is no God but Allah. This, of course, contrasts with the other view: those of the mystic Sufis who see God's magnificence through the plurality and diversity of his creation. In mysticism the emphasis is on the love of God rather than fear of God. It stresses direct, personal devotion to God in place of ritualistic, outward observance.

In Pakistan Sufism has deep roots, but it is not of much use to the political activist. The Islamic militant needs an ideology that transforms believers into soldiers of the faith. To conquer the world you need an army. An army needs a clear chain of command, uniforms, polished boots, drills and training in the use of firearms; and a doctrine that explains who is the enemy and why. Discipline is the essence of life in the barracks, not freedom. In the time of Zia ul-Haq both elements were fused. The compact was this. The army needed to be fired by faith. The faith would operate as an army. Religion, in its former plenitude and richness, was left to fend for itself, as were civil society and civility. The result is there for all to see. The tree has been denuded of its branches, its leaves, its birds and its bark. It is almost dead wood. The tree is ready for glorious martyrdom on the way of Allah. Soon it may be decided that it has become so pure that it cannot be saved from the axe. Then the paradox of life in death has come true. The culture of death has triumphed. As Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brothers, put it: 'The art of death; death is art.'

Opposite our embassy in Islamabad students from the neighbouring *madrassa* have burnt a huge ancient banyan-tree. It is said that Buddha or a Bodhisatva sat under the tree. That is why the students burnt the tree, as the Taliban destroyed the Buddhist statues in Afghanistan. They are considered idols. But one side of the tree is still clinging to life. Our embassy is going to save the tree and make a little park around it. We'll also plant another banyan.

The situation of Pakistan is like that of the tree. Perhaps the tree will get a new chance. If not, it will have serious consequences for the viability of other trees elsewhere.

The Future of Political Islam in Pakistan

If Musharraf's policies are taken to their logical conclusion the country goes back to where it went wrong. It will vote Mawdudi out and Jinnah in. Even in the elections after 9/11 political Islam only gained seats in the Taliban border areas with Afghanistan. *In the major federal states the Islamic parties won less than one-sixth of the seats obtained by the liberal opposition party.* In a fully democratic state the Jamaat-i Islami has no option but to become an Islamic Democrat party.

Is that possible? Yes, but only if political Islam accepts secularism, which so far it had refused. Two other conditions are essential: the peaceful dialogue with India must be sustained and there must be a return to full democracy. Political Islam has flourished in the absence of both. Political Islam has not been voted into a position of power. It has been able to infiltrate centres of power thanks to war and autocratic rule.

37

How to remove obstacles to separation of religion and politics in an Islamic state? How to deal with Islamic militants calling for resistance to a state ruled by infidels? In the case of Pakistan the answer can be straightforward. Key are peace with neighbours; full democracy and a sound constitution; the right kind of education; a ban on spreading hatred and incitement; control of funding for intolerant Islamic groups from oil-rich Gulf states and indigenous sources. None of this is impossible if the leadership musters the political will. As Musharraf has made clear his commitment to these objectives, there is a window of opportunity. Western support is essential.

The opportunities are there. Just consider this.

- National elections are to be held in 2007. The secular socialist party of Benazir Bhutto may soon re-enter the field. A group of liberals, the Liberal Forum Pakistan, wants to lead the country back to Jinnah's secular vision. It can play the role of Jamaat-i Islami for liberalism. In the present climate liberals can operate with reasonable freedom. Parliamentarians wish to create an independent election commission, as strong as the one of India. They want Pakistan to compete with India as a democratic, secu-

lar state instead of the sectarian Islamic model. India, a Hindu majority state, has a Muslim president and a Sikh Prime Minister. Why should Pakistan ban members of the Ahmadi sect from being in government?

- South Africa has reclaimed its future from a miserable past and forged ahead with a modern constitution. The victory over Apartheid brought strong guarantees for equality. The bane of Pakistan has been *religious* intolerance and discrimination. At some point taking the country back to where it went wrong will require a new constitution. South Africa could provide inspiration.
- Jihad in Afghanistan is finished. Jihadism in Kashmir is way down. For the first time in history India and Pakistan are engaged in sustained dialogue and cooperating to improve the situation in Kashmir. Both countries try to involve the Kashmiris themselves in a constructive manner.
- Militant Islamic groups and jihadis have lost their support from the Pakistani State. The Islamic parties are in opposition and can be decisively defeated at the next elections.
- For the first time a forceful education minister is sidelining the Jamaat-i Islami advisers of his ministry. Curriculum reform is firmly on the agenda. NGO's can be involved in writing new textbooks that open up the creative potential of the new generation.

In many Arab countries the answer of regimes has been to crack down on both the radicals and pro-democracy liberals. The matter of principle is left undecided. Instead, a stifling social climate is created, characterised by lack of freedom and concessions to religious conservatism. Corruption and nepotism choke off the economy. Young people dream about leaving.

Pakistan can escape this pattern by reclaiming the original vision of Jinnah. In education and the media the priority should be to restore historical perspective. The theocratic ideal of the *salafi* movement is a desperate attempt to put time in reverse and then freeze history: a Utopia projected backwards. In modern Pakistan and much of the Islamic world mediaeval literature is not seen as witness of history, but as a guide to how things should be today. For example, one of the most popular books in Pakistan is *The Garden of the Virtuous*, a

collection of traditions compiled by the 13th-century Syrian scholar an-Nawawi. It is a handbook of Islamic etiquette: how to eat, how to sleep, how to speak, and so on. It exhorts one to spend generously on the poor and weak, without fear of poverty. But it also quotes the Prophet's saying that fighting must continue until everyone on earth pronounces 'No God but Allah and Muhammad is His Prophet.' This was written 700 years ago. Now I quote a Pakistani commentary written five years ago: 'This story strongly refutes those who distort Jihad and hold that Islam preaches defensive war only.' The modern writer also proudly shows that a pregnant woman cannot be stoned to death for adultery: first she is allowed to deliver the baby, and only then she will be stoned.

Let me give another example. The Islamic schools of law are unanimous that a male apostate must be put to death, if he is grown up, not mad and acted of his own free will. That conclusion was reached 1000 years ago. Ten years ago a Pakistani study of the Salman Rushdie case applied this verdict to modern times: 'It is the duty of every Muslim to apprehend and bring such a person to justice. For blasphemous dogs capital punishment is the only appropriate penalty.' Even making an ugly face when the Prophet's name is mentioned counts as blasphemy under Islamic law. Blasphemers will be punished repeatedly: first in the world, then a violent and horrible death, then painful punishment in the grave, then everlasting agony in the Hereafter. According to the Quran 'mocking, laughing at and ridiculing' the Prophet is blasphemy.

This cannot be laughed off as private ranting. It is the orthodox view held by the authorities of the Quran and Sunnah. It has been incorporated in Pakistani law by Zia ul-Haq. So far no one has been executed, but plenty of people have been condemned to death for it and spent years in jail. Even today it is rare for anyone to stand up and state publicly that these laws are not meant for eternity but are obsolete, cruel and inhuman. They maintain a climate of intimidation and fear. Their removal, therefore, is a crucial test of the political will to stand up against intolerance and extremist religious dictates. Even more important, education and media should explain that Islam is not outside history and is part of human civilisation.

The enemies of the open society should not be allowed to imprison Muslims in a dungeon of the mind.

Political Islam does not study history for history's sake, but in search of ideological ammunition for Jihad. This should be reversed. Teaching how to teach history is not an easy matter in an Islamic state. It is easier at Leiden University. Also, it is only part of the solution. In many states there is a vested interest in presenting Islam as a story of nobility oppressed by wicked enemies – in the tradition of the Shia martyrdom of Ali and Hussein. At the other end of the scale are frustration and desperation of citizens. It is a small step from an inferiority complex to a superiority complex. Political Islam suffers from both. It claims to be victim of Western conspiracies. But its programme preaches Muslim supremacy. Seen in this light, political Islam is more a subject of psycho-pathology or psycho-sociology than theology.

40

In Pakistan the reform of education looks more promising than in other Islamic states. It may influence other states. This will not happen through the ghostly Organisation of Islamic States, which is as unrepresentative for the public as the governments of most member states. Everyone knows it but pretends otherwise. People watching the doings of the Islamic state on tv are in a state of 'suspended disbelief': one's state of mind when reading a work of fiction or watching a movie. Private foundations and charities are the real actors. The *Ummah*, the Islamic world community, is privatising and the world-wide web has become a particle accelerator for a sectarian Islam. The dream of political Islam, a shining Islamic superpower, has become part of the geography of the mind. For governments the urgent task is to control the destructive powers of these private, cross-border actors.

Conclusion

If Pakistan went back to where it went wrong, it would set a powerful example at the heart of the Islamic world. It would also be significant for Europe and its Muslim minority. If in the Muslim world Turkey remains isolated in its choice for secularism, Turkey's inclusion in Europe will not have a great effect on Islamic radicalism

elsewhere. It is important that Turkey does not remain the exception. Pakistan is a major Sunni non-Arab state with a diverse culture. If it chooses pluralism over Islamic ideology it can make a great difference in the world.

None of the good things happening in the world of Islam is irreversible. Nor are the bad things. Our enemy has been inattention and indifference. If we want to fight radical and intolerant Islam, it is time that we start supporting the liberal forces in the Islamic world in earnest.

WHAT FUTURE FOR POLITICAL ISLAM?

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Graham Fuller is an independent writer, analyst, lecturer and consultant on Muslim World affairs and Adjunct Professor of History at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. He is a former Vice-Chairman of the National Intelligence Council at CIA. After leaving government in 1988 he served as Senior Political Scientist at RAND for twelve years, where his work focussed on the Middle East, Central Asia, South and Southeast Asia, and ethnic problems of the former Soviet Union. He received his BA and MA at Harvard University in Russian and Middle Eastern studies. He served 20 years in the Foreign Service, mostly the Muslim World, working in Germany, Turkey, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, North Yemen, Afghanistan and Hong Kong. In 1982 he was appointed the National Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia at CIA, and in 1986 Vice-Chairman of the National Intelligence Council at CIA, with overall responsibility for all national level strategic forecasting. He is author of the following books: *The Center of the Universe: the Geopolitics of Iran* (Westview 1991); *The New Foreign Policy of Turkey: From the Balkans to Western China*, with Ian Lesser (Westview 1993); *A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West*, with Ian Lesser (Westview 1994); *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, with Henri Barkey (Rowman and Littlefield 1997); *The Arab Shi'a: the Forgotten Muslims*, with Rend Francke (St. Martin's 1999); *The Future of Political Islam* (Palgrave 2003). His articles appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *The National Interest*, *World Policy Journal*, *Orbis*, *Current History*, *Middle East Insight*, *The Middle East Journal*, *Mediterranean Quarterly*.

Mr. Fuller is a regular contributor to *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times* and *Christian Science Monitor*. He has appeared frequently on ABC's 'Nightline', ABC Evening News, CNN, etc., and comments regularly for BBC radio, Voice of America and other news stations.

Marcel Kurpershoek is Dutch ambassador to Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. He joined the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs in 1974 where he fulfilled various positions at the Royal Netherlands Embassies in Cairo and Damascus and at the Permanent Mission of the Netherlands to the UN in New York. From 1986 to 1990 he was Counsellor and Deputy Head of Mission at the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Riyadh, Saudi-Arabia. From 1990 to 1994 he headed the Political Department at the Permanent Mission of the Netherlands to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in Brussels and from 1994 to 1996 he was Director of the United Nations Political Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From 1996 to 2002 he was Director of the North Africa and Middle Eastern Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From 1996 to mid June 2003 he held the honorary chair as Professor for Literature and Politics in the Arab World at Leiden University. He is author of the following books: *Camels & Palm-trees, Saudi History from a Tribal Perspective. The Short Stories of Yusuf Idris, A Modern Egyptian Author* (Leiden 1981); *Oral Poetry & Narratives from Central Arabia, The Poetry of ad-Dindan, a Bedouin Bard in Southern Najd* (Leiden 1994); *The Story of a Desert Knight, the Legend of Shlewih al-'Atawi and other 'Utaybah Heroes* (Leiden 1995); *Onzalig Jeruzalem* (Amsterdam 1996); *Bedouin Poets of the Dawasir Tribe, Between Nomadism & Settlement in Southern Najd* (Leiden 1999). His latest work *Wie luidt de doodsklok over de Arabieren* is a collection of essays written in the past twenty years on Arab film, reports by the World Bank, adultery, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the position of women. He also published *Diep in Arabië* and *De laatste bedoeïen*, both travel stories which were translated into Arab and English.

The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, WRR) is an independent advisory body for Dutch government policy. The Council focuses on policy issues with long term social, economic, technological and political significance, which, as a consequence, transcend the policy domains of the various ministries. Members of the Council are highly qualified academics, appointed by the government for a period of five years. The WRR is an independent think tank; it directs its own research programme, which is funded from the budget of the Prime Minister's Office.

The annual WRR lecture offers policy makers and academics a high profile opportunity to discuss current policy issues with long term relevance for Dutch society.

WRR

SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL FOR GOVERNMENT POLICY

Lange Vijverberg 4-5, Postbus 20004, 2500 EA Den Haag
telefoon +31(0)70 356 46 00, fax +31 (0)70 356 46 85, e-mail info@wrr.nl, website www.wrr.nl