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A Framework for Understanding Radical Islam's Challenge to European Governments

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Introduction

Demography is one of Europe's most significant challenges. A relatively high Muslim birthrate in Europe and an alarmingly low birthrate among indigenous Europeans, combined with the tendency of Muslims to live in urban areas, suggest that many European cities will have Muslim majorities by 2020 or 2025, even with government imposition of tighter immigration restrictions.

To take one city, Bradford, UK, one of the early destinations of Pakistani immigrants after the Second World War, the 1991 census recorded 64,000 Muslims representing 13 per cent of the population. By 2001, there were 94,000 Muslims, a 50 per cent increase from 1991. In 2001, Muslims represented nearly 20 per cent of overall population but over 30 per cent of students and 50 per cent of toddlers. By 2011, Muslims will represent close to 30 per cent of the population in Bradford and over 50 per cent of its students.[1] The high growth rates and youth bubble create a burgeoning pool of young Muslim males. The Muslim population surge is most apparent in the British Midlands and in the adjacent corridor across the channel from northern France through Belgium and Holland.

Europe's challenge is thus one of integration. The question one must ask, given these trends and the worrisome manifestations of Islamic radicalism accompanying the rise of a new generation of European-born Muslims, is: what tools can Europe adopt to ensure a successful integration of this growing minority?

Defining Europe's challenges

When one speaks of integration, aside from the obvious elements of learning the local language and earning a living, there is the ticklish question of absorbing national or European values. A new 'European' national identity does not yet exist. As for member states, national identity is weak, especially in Western Europe, where Muslim immigration is most significant. Muslim immigrant communities in Europe are therefore supposed to integrate into societies that are themselves experiencing an erosion of

nationalism just as transnational Islam is rising. Thus, a key instrument in integration policy is lacking when it is most needed.

As if this were not enough, secular Europe finds itself confronted by a growing sense of Muslim solidarity with the result that a Dutch Muslim teenager in Rotterdam may identify more closely with fellow Muslims in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia than with his non-Muslim Dutch neighbors. Part of this Muslim solidarity comes from the fostering of separate identities by persuasive messages from both local and global “Imams”, reinforced by the narrative of persecution fostered on Arab satellite television and on the internet. A pattern develops: a second or third generation 19-year-old European Muslim male, who is identity shopping, may come under the influence of a charismatic imam in the local mosque or fellow friends in a local book store or university society. He becomes a Muslim reborn and sometimes even takes on an Arabic name.[2] Once a true believer, he can move up the ladder of radicalization fairly quickly.[3]

This phenomenon is particularly worrisome because, rather than tamping down on the radicals in their midst, many Muslim community leaders in Europe tend to blame others - government, media, foreign policy and America - for fostering a climate of Islamophobia. A narrative of persecution that depicts events in the Middle East in such a way as to stimulate an identity of vicarious grievances is nurtured by many among the self-described moderate leadership within Muslim communities. [4] As a consequence, European Muslims have developed an empathy with Muslim victims throughout the world, and have convinced themselves that their own exclusion and the persecution of their brothers originate from the same roots: rejection of Islam by the West. It is no wonder that 16-18 year olds growing up in neighborhoods in Amsterdam, Birmingham and Lyon are becoming radicalized right in their own neighborhoods. They are the new homegrown potential Jihadis that are of increasing concern to government authorities.

Government responses

European governments have tried to address this challenge. Their responses vary, but they are so far insufficient to tackle the long-term challenge of rising Islamic radicalism among their Muslim minorities. Government responses are particularly inadequate in four areas:

1. *Fence sitters*. Too little attention has been focused on the fence sitters in the Muslim community. Fence sitters are crucial because they can provide tacit support to hardcore Islamists who, with such support in their communities, can more easily evade monitoring by security services. Fence sitters pose a tactical problem if they are reluctant to cooperate with authorities in turning in the homegrown Jihadis. Peter Clarke, head of Police Counter-Terrorism Chief in the United Kingdom, stated bluntly in a public address on April 24, 2007 that “Almost all of our prosecutions have their origins in intelligence that came from overseas, the intelligence agencies or from technical means. Few have yet originated from what is sometimes called ‘community intelligence.’ Fencesitters are also a strategic target in that some might choose to throw their lot with radical Islamists under

the banner of Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, al-Qaeda or other revolutionary Islamists, or they may decide to invest their energies in getting on with their jobs, careers and lives as full-fledged citizens in their host European countries. Many fence sitters are waiting to see which side appears to be winning. The jury is still out.

2. *Criminalization.* In Europe one side appears to be fighting a long-term war and the other side treats this ideological attack on values as a social or criminal problem to be solved through improved social engineering and court prosecutions. If persuasion and mobilization by imams and media are the critical enablers of radicalization, then criminal law-enforcement approaches that focus on the operational but not on the motivational side, and treat the symptoms rather than its causes, may be insufficient to deal with the terrorist threat. Emphasis must be placed on influential figures such as Abu Hamza al Masri, the imam who made such a deep impression on his followers, including Richard Reid, the Shoe Bomber, and Zacarias Moussaoui, the twentieth 9/11 hijacker. For every charismatic imam, there are several more young men converted to the cause of radical Islam who pose potential threats to their societies.

3. *Militarization.* The US tendency to emphasize military solutions to this ideological war is similarly flawed. Military attacks, like court proceedings, tend to target the end-user, the terrorist, rather than those who inspire the attacks. Former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld asked during the Afghanistan war on October 16, 2003 whether “the harder we work, the behinder we get?” His question recognized implicitly that the swamp incubating extremism was growing faster than known terrorists could be captured or killed.

4. *Political Islamism.* Government attempts to co-opt political Islamists from the Muslim Brotherhood and elsewhere in order to isolate extreme radicals may be misguided. Many Muslim leaders in Europe present themselves to governments as moderates who can rein in extremists. The agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood, for instance, is not a violent one, but a political one: to politicize European Muslims into voting blocs that advocate Shari’a tribunals for civil and domestic matters, that seek to roll back secular toleration of gays and gender equality, and that use international and other issues to separate Muslims from non-Muslims in Europe. Separate Muslim districts or millets in Europe might eventually become no-go zones for non-Muslims beyond the control of the *kaffir* state. This appears to be happening in some European inner cities, such as Antwerp, where Islamists are becoming more influential in the Moroccan neighborhoods that are mushrooming as indigenous Belgians move out to the countryside or to other countries.

Contrasting British and French approaches

In trying to assess government responses, a comparison of two existing European models sheds light on existing flaws and potential remedies to the challenge of integration. The British approach of multiculturalism, or live and let live, which has to some extent been emulated in Scandinavia, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium, fosters the very separate communities advocated by some political Islamists. One mitigating factor in

Britain's favor is the relatively greater economic opportunity available to British Muslims in contrast to France, where the lack of job creation impacts heavily on young North Africans living in the *banlieues*. When it comes to combating extremism, however, the French system of *laïcité* (secularism), which promotes assimilation and discourages religious and ethnic identification, is buttressed by a tougher legal regime than is found in the UK and other European countries. French law outlaws hate-speech and authorizes the removal of troublemakers from the streets and their preventive detention more or less indefinitely. These measures make it easy to deport imams and extremists, even as some hold French passports. French law also permits the security apparatus to engage in more extensive surveillance techniques. A specialized judiciary branch for terrorism has evolved with judges that act in some ways as prosecutors. In this respect, the French system has worked fairly well. The flaw is that exclusive French reliance on a legal deterrent through prosecution and deportation means that inadequate resources are invested in tackling the ideological dimension of extremism. The French government's hyper-secular vantage point makes it difficult for them to debate Islamists who can argue back with a patina of religion. It remains to be seen whether France is getting at the root cause of Islamism or, more likely, is keeping the symptoms under control.

The British clearly are backing away from multiculturalism. Glorification of terrorism is now outlawed. Some of the most egregious preachers of hate like Hamza al Masri have been prosecuted. Yet the British legal system retains a distinction between word and deed. The platform and words of the radical group, Hizb ut-Tahrir, and other extremists are not enough to make them outlaws, notwithstanding their homophobic, misogynist, anti-Semitic dogma and their call for the replacement of the British political and legal system with the caliphate under Shari'a law. The policy to co-opt and dialogue with more mainstream organizations such as the Muslim Council of Britain and the Muslim Assn. of Britain has similarly backfired: rather than encouraging moderation, this approach has empowered leaders with radical views and indicated that radicalism pays off.

Conclusion

Are European governments faced with a problem to which there is no solution? Reversing negative growth trends among indigenous Europeans is not easy. Promoting Western values is an awkward task for government, although inculcating the primacy of citizenship and civic duties over group identity politics is a promising place to start, and it appears that the British are moving in that direction. The *laïcité* model, which insists on assimilation, provides the French with a strong ideological barrier against the rising tide of group-identity politics that characterizes political Islam. Président Sarköcy's challenge is to create job opportunities so that the promises of *égalité* resonate among the unemployed and alienated youth of North African origin.

As a rule, European governments need to find ways to mobilize the Muslim leadership within Europe to play a more effective role in promoting bridging with the majority societies side by side with bonding within the Muslim community. The right balance of bridging and bonding has historically proven successful for other immigrant communities and their offspring, especially in Britain, where Indians from Uganda expelled by Idi

Amin in the early 1970s have become remarkably successful in today's United Kingdom. Where is the elusive bridging between the Muslim communities and indigenous Europeans? The challenge within Muslim communities today is to find a strong and appealing counterbalance to the seductive lure of a transnational Muslim identity forged in foreign policy grievances, a culture of victimization and a sense of alienation that is only partially fed by socio-economic factors.

The challenges for European governments are first, to recognize that demographic trends are reasons for concern in that demography does impact the ability to achieve positive integration. Second, the radicalization of European Muslims is not primarily a criminal or a terrorist problem and even the most robust legal system is not enough to contain radical ideas from spreading. Third, rather than empower Islamic community leaders who assert a world view based not on religious piety but on a global political movement, governments might consider the experiment of the new German Islam Conference that reaches out to secular Muslims who want to climb the economic ladder and who identify themselves primarily as musicians, doctors, teachers, engineers or students, and only as Muslims in terms of their faith. Europe is beginning to awaken to the need to assert firm and non-negotiable political and social principles based on European values while offering a more inclusive narrative to allow immigrant communities and their offspring to be Muslim and European at the same time.

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[1] Alex R. Alexiev, presenter at Conference, "Les Democracies face au defi Islamiste," Institut pour la Defense de la Democratie and Center for Security Policy, Paris, 13 March 2006.

[2] The attraction of the contemporary 'virtual umma' is a core theme of Olivier Roy in Globalized Islam, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

[3] Conversation with head of MI5, who noted that the gestation time from radicalism to terrorism is shortening in the UK from years to months. RUSI Conference on Politics and Terrorism, London, March 14, 2007

[4] Farhad Khoshrovar, in Currents and Crosscurrents of Radical Islamism," CSIS Transatlantic Dialogue on Terrorism Report, April 2006, p. 12

[5] Claude Moniquet, Testimony at House Committee, Washington, April, 2005.

[6] Peter Clarke, “Learning from Experience-Counter Terrorism in the UK since 9/11,” The Colin Cramphorn Memorial Lecture, Policy Exchange, April 24, 2007.

[7] Conversation with Paul Belien, Belgian journalist, Brussels, March 25, 2007

[8] Shamit Saggat, University of Sussex Lecture, UK, March 16, 2006

[9] Meeting with Markus Kerber, director of the Deutsche Islam Konferenz in the German Ministry of Interior, April 20, 2007

[10] Zeyno Baran, “Countering Ideological Support for Terrorism in Europe: Muslim Brotherhood and Hizb ut- Tahrir--Allies or Enemies?” Hudson.org, Connections Quarterly, p. 34;

http://www.hudson.org/files/pdf_upload/Zeyno%20PDF.pdf

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