

RECOMMENDED READING

Globalized Islam:

The Search for a New Ummah

by Oliver Roy (2004, Columbia University Press, New York City, 349 pages)

OLIVER ROY, A PROFESSOR AT THE SCHOOL OF ADVANCED Studies in Social Sciences in Paris, has written previously about Islam in a global context. In *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, he argues that the spread of Islam around the globe has blurred the connection between a religion, a specific society and a territory.



One-third of the world's Muslims now live as members of a minority. Though millions of Muslims have settled voluntarily in the West, they are concerned about the pervasiveness and influence of Western culture, and the effect its models and social norms have on Islam as a system of values and ethics. The return to the Islamic tradition has been

accompanied by a growth in westernization. Thus the revival of Islam has been a consequence of westernization, not a clash with it. This thesis clashes with the views of political scientist and author Samuel Huntington, whose books have been reviewed in previous editions of *Real Estate Issues*.

Neofundamentalism has been gaining ground among a rootless Muslim youth, especially second- and third-generation migrants in the West, Roy notes. This trend has produced new forms of radicalism, including Al Qaeda, and rejection of integration into Western society. The uprooted militants wish to establish an imaginary *ummah*, a Muslim community built around Islamic values, that isn't embedded in any particular society or territory.

Roy also asks how we can reconcile hatred for the West with the long lines for visas outside Western consulates. This reality appears to be a dichotomy until readers realize the neofundamentalist *ummah* has nothing to do with territorial integrity, and instead should be considered in abstract terms.

The quest for Islamic authenticity begins with debunking Western culture and values, Roy asserts. However, without territory, leaders cannot sustain religious or social dogmas through civic authority. For these reasons, creating an

abstract worldwide community, or *ummah*, is far more important than creating a state. The violence of Islamic terrorists is less a product of their religion than their identification with recent leftist and Third World radical movements. The war on terrorism is a metaphor, not a real policy, Roy writes—more a police and intelligence issue than a military one.

The author also stresses that groups such as Al Qaeda need not recruit from the Middle East; thousands of candidates are in Western Europe where Muslims, unlike those in the U.S., are mainly from the working class. Roy points out that Muslims comprise 10 percent of the Berlin population; Muslims also were a large portion of the crowds participating in recent demonstrations in France. He also suggests the openness of the United Kingdom's legal system toward political asylum and free speech has prompted French antiterrorist police officials to give London the new nickname of Londonistan.

SECULAR SOCIETIES ELICIT NEOFUNDAMENTALISTS' RANCOR

Westernized Muslims may have lost their culture, but not their religion. A distinction, again, at odds with Huntington's views. Though most European Christians have endorsed secularism, Muslims see Europe as Christian, so much so that one UK militant group has called for all UK politicians and other leaders to convert to Islam. Meanwhile in U.S. mosques, 97 percent of attendees speak English as their primary language. To live as a minority is to experience Islam as only a religion confined to one's private life, Roy writes.

By rejecting the Western culture in which they live, neofundamentalists are unable to create a Muslim culture. Neofundamentalists stress the gap between culture and religion—they have no popular Muslim novelists, comedians, film-makers or poets in the West—which contributes to the secularization they abhor. Then, they reconstruct themselves with veils, beards and language.

Insecurity about the limits of the community drives fanaticism, Roy writes, and leads to the rejection of Western social rules. A French radical summarized this psychological phenomenon when he announced: "I am not French; I am not an Arab; I am a Muslim." Muslim neofundamentalists have created a virtual world—an imaginary, purely religious community surrounded by a

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hostile or indifferent secular world. And they must declare a *jihad* to defend the frontiers of the ummah.

Al Qaeda has no strategic vision, Roy writes; it fights against Babylon. Most Al Qaeda targets have no military or strategic value: a nightclub in Bali or a Spanish restaurant in Casablanca. Instead, Al Qaeda is an organization and a trademark that can operate directly, in a joint venture or through a franchise.

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Since the fall of the Taliban, Al Qaeda has lost its sanctuary in Afghanistan and has had difficulty gaining support from any significant local population. So it moves around the world from *jihad* to *jihad*, its leaders becoming the *jihad* jet set. Its base is mosques in London and Hamburg as much as the *madrasa*. Its history has nothing to do with Middle East conflicts, and its members are a combination of educated middle class leaders and working class drop outs, similar to leftist radical groups. Many are born-again Muslims or jail-house converts, and they behave in Western ways: They drink, smoke, go clubbing and chase girls. Al Qaeda is more a mafia or a sect than a professional underground organization. The enemy is elusive and sometime merely our own shadow.

RISE OF TERRORISM FORESHADOWS A LARGER ISSUE

Roy argues that religion and culture are not as interconnected as Huntington believes. The values of the Christian faith can remain embedded in a culture even when the religion wanes and the culture otherwise turns secular, Roy writes. There are Jews who are cultural without being religious and conservative Protestants who use religion to try to establish social mores without the concept of a shared culture. Secularization does not mean the end of religion, but the separation of religion from the other

spheres of social life. Thus, a religious revival can be compatible with growing secularization.

Roy's book concludes with the story of the Baghdad caliph's tailor. The caliph wanted to punish a tailor who had overcharged him so he ordered a henchman to hang the tailor at the gate of his house. The henchman returned, saying the tailor was too tall for the gate. "Find a smaller tailor and hang him," the caliph answered. In a similar fashion, the military apparatus tailors the enemy.

Terrorists have no long-term strategy, Roy writes, and terrorism is a marginal symptom of a larger problem that deserves a response. But radical violence is better understood within a larger framework: the relationship of all modern religions with secularization, individualization, culture and politics.

Roy's work is a catalyst for thinking about terrorism as well as other societal issues in a way that is intelligent and provocative regardless of readers' position on current events in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Reflecting on the book reminds me of a speech that former U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz delivered several years ago. He cited two primary functions of a nation state as controlling currency and waging war. But in today's world, the globalization of money and capital markets together with the roles played by George Soros and the hedge funds make it increasingly difficult to control a nation's monetary base. And real-time news coverage provided by CNN and others makes it increasingly difficult to sustain long and bloody conflicts. The new brand of jet-age *jihad* operating outside of national boundaries could be added to Schultz's list. ■

1 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) was a German scholar whose philosophy of history is essentially that of a dialectical progression. This model begins with an existing element, or thesis, with contradictions inherent to its structure. These contradictions create the thesis' direct opposite, or antithesis, bringing about a period of conflict between the two. The new element, or synthesis, that emerges from this conflict then discovers its own internal contradictions, and starts the process anew.