

11 September 2001 and Muslim–West Relations

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Most observers and analysts predict that in the coming years the potential for South-to-North migration will increase rather than decrease. Quite simply, there are far too many people on the lookout for work than can be supported by peripheral capitalism in their own countries. It can reasonably be assumed that in the overall influx from the South, the 'Muslim' portion of it is likely to be viewed as the most problematic. The rightwing movements and parties talk of a Trojan-horse conspiracy: Muslims are quietly entering the North with a view one day to establishing Islamic authority. Some such fears certainly motivate the EU not to act generously towards Turkey, a predominantly Muslim country which opted for Westernization and secularization in the early 1920s.

After 11 September 2001, the sensational twist to Muslim immigration has paid dividends to some parties in Europe. Thus in Austria, the Netherlands, France, Denmark and Norway, the Right has been making alarming electoral advances, and even in North America the climate has turned harsh against the Muslims. The Muslim community comprises diverse sectarian, ethnic, linguistic and national entities, who normally have little basis for regular interaction with one another. However, since Islam does furnish the notion of a universal community of faith, the Islamic Ummah, a feeling of cultural affinity exists among these various groups in relation to the dominant host culture. Occasionally, this affinity serves as a basis for collective identity among the Muslims. During the 1990 Gulf War, British Muslim citizens, especially the very large Pakistani group, were asked to define their position on the conflict. The spokesmen for the Muslim organisations declared that their primary loyalty was to Islam, but assured that if Britain were to be attacked by an outside power they would defend it. In some cases, extremist Muslim groups have openly been preaching separatism. The idea of a Muslim parliament in the UK was floated some years ago but it is worth noting that it failed to attract much support. On

the other hand, there are allegations of fundamentalist organisations being more successful in recruiting young Muslim men for various jihadi networks.

Assuming that the underlying ideology and policy of the Western states is to integrate rather than assimilate or expel Muslim immigrants, the future interaction in this regard between them would tend to include different facets and momentums, provided at the world level, Muslim and Western relationships 'normalize'. The two sides will not enter into this interactive mode as equals. The Muslim community will have to establish its cultural presence within the prevalent norms and principles. From the European side, the crucial problem and challenge will be to devise a policy towards Muslims consistent with the underlying premises of individualism and universalism. On the other hand, the Muslim community will be interested in having a cultural space that it can withdraw to in order to maintain its distinct identity. The interaction between the two sides will take place within the framework of the sovereignty of the nation-state or that of the European Union super-state. If, now, integration is conceived as comprising three main spheres, economic, political and cultural, the integration then will proceed in the following manner.

Integration into the economy will be the swiftest provided enough scope exists for the Muslims to gain employment or some other means of making an income. Political integration will be slower, largely because the language skills and acquiring citizenship rights take much longer. Usually political participation picks up pace only when the first generation of children of immigrant parents attain majority. Cultural integration will be the slowest, since the foundational basis of Muslim culture is a religious one. The culture purists may even strive for segregation by demanding the application of Islamic law. This will not be granted because it would collide with the sovereignty of the state.

Things can go wry rather quickly if the USA embarks upon a policy of aggression and occupation of Muslim societies. In particular, there is no justification for an attack on Iraq as long as the United Nations inspectors do not find conclusive evidence of the Iraqi leadership's violation of the UN resolutions which forbid it to possess and produce or possess the capability to produce weapons of mass destruction. In the eyes of the Muslim world the USA would be acting purely as a greedy and arrogant bully. The Muslim fundamentalists are likely to expand their support and sympathy base in such circumstances. The USA can radically alter the opinion in the Muslim world if it lends its weight and prestige to the implementation of UN resolutions 242 and 338 in Palestine. It could play a crucial role in rendering the extremist agenda of the fundamentalists superfluous and worthy of contempt.

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