

Editorial

Debating Moderate Islam: An Introduction

Since the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, there have been several conversations about the different interpretations of Islam, its impact on Muslim politics, and the relationship between Islam and the West. This debate gained renewed vigor after the London attacks on July 7 and 21, 2005. Scholars and policymakers agree that a politically angry and intellectually narrow interpretation of Islam – loosely referred to as *militant* or *radical* Islam – is exacerbating the already rampant anti-Americanism in the Muslim world and encouraging terrorist responses to real and perceived injustices. Some analysts assert that the United States is completely innocent and thus blame radical Islamists alone for all of the problems in the world, while others totally ignore the existence of extremism in the Muslim world and blame the United States for all of the ills of our times. Most people are somewhere in between.

Regardless of where one stands in this debate, there is now a growing consensus that those on the moderate side in the Muslim world must assert themselves and join the battle against extremism. Western governments are being advised to actively welcome the help and cooperation of moderate Muslims in order to ensure that the war against extremism does not become – or appear to be – a war against Islam. This policy idea of including moderate Muslims as allies against extremism in the Muslim world has generated an interesting debate about what moderation really means and who is a moderate Muslim.

In this special issue of the *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, prominent voices from the policy community, the academic community, and the American Muslim community come together to debate who is a moderate Muslim and just what moderation means in a theological as well as a geopolitical sense. The participants also debate and reflect on the future of political Islam, the role of Islam in Muslim politics, western poli-

cies in the Muslim world and their ramifications, and, finally, the future of American-Muslim relations.

The Structure of the Debate

Given that the debate's structure is a bit unusual and complex, I feel that it is important to explain it here. There are two types of participants: the actual debaters and the commentators. The debaters are Ariel Cohen, John L. Esposito, Graham E. Fuller, Abid Ullah Jan, and M. A. Muqtedar Khan. The debaters make two contributions: Each one answers the same five related questions and then rebuts and responds to the answers provided by the other four participants.

Each participant brings a wide range of perspective to this debate. Cohen is a prominent policy analyst at a prestigious think tank associated with a strongly conservative and, occasionally, a neoconservative viewpoint. Esposito is a widely respected and quoted authority on Islam and an important voice in the academy. Fuller is a former intelligence analyst who brings both sensitivity to the government's viewpoint as well as an awareness of security and geopolitical issues. Jan, who is associated with the Islamic movement in Pakistan, is representative of what is known as political Islamism. Khan, the convener and editor of this debate, is often referred to as the voice of moderate Islam. The participants expose the enormous complexity of the issues at hand and manifest the great diversity of views and interpretations in the ongoing discussion of American-Islamic relations.

The commentators are Feisal Abdul Raouf, Ali Mazrui, Louay Safi, Mahmood Mamdani, Hakan Yavuz, and Taha Jabir al-Alwani. These contributors, who enjoy a great deal of freedom, were asked to comment either on the debate itself or answer the questions, if they felt that the debaters were missing some vital issues. The perspectives that they bring are wide and deep, for they look at the issues from jurisprudential, mystical, anthropological, progressive, and political standpoints.

There is a great deal of material in this debate for those who are academically interested in Islam's role in global politics. Policymakers will find many issues clarified, as well as clear directions provided for improving American-Muslim relations and combating extremism. For students and teachers, many of the ideas and analyses presented herein will stimulate debate and understanding.

Acknowledgements

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Biographies of Contributors

- Ariel Cohen is a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation. He is the author of *Russian Imperialism* (Praeger: 1998) and co-author and editor of *Eurasia in Balance* (Ashgate: 2005 [forthcoming]).
- John L. Esposito is a university professor and founding director of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University. He is the author of over thirty books on Islam, including *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (Oxford: 2002), *What Everyone Needs To Know about Islam* (Oxford: 2002), and *Islam: The Straight Path*, 3d rev. ed. (Oxford: 2004).
- Graham E. Fuller is a former vice-chair of the CIA's National Intelligence Council. He served as an American foreign service officer in several Middle Eastern countries for nearly two decades, and worked at the RAND Corporation as a senior political scientist on Middle Eastern issues for twelve years. He has written widely on many aspects of Middle Eastern politics. His latest book is *The Future of Political Islam* (Palgrave: 2003).
- Abid Ullah Jan is associated with the Independent Center for Strategic Studies and Analyses, a Canadian think tank. A frequent commentator on Islam and global politics, his columns are published widely by the Muslim media. In addition, he is the author of several books, including *A War on Islam?* (Pragmatic Publishers: 2001) and *The End of Democracy* (Pragmatic Publishers: 2004).
- M. A. Muqtedar Khan is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Delaware, a non-resident fellow at the Brookings Institute, and is associated with the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. He is the

author of *American Muslims: Bridging Faith and Freedom* (amana: 2002) and *Jihad for Jerusalem: Identity and Strategy in International Relations* (Praeger: 2004), as well as the editor of *Islamic Democratic Discourse* (Lexington Press: 2005 [forthcoming]).

- Feisal Abdul Raouf is the imam of Masjid al-Farah in New York City and founder of the American Sufi Muslim Association (ASMA) society. He is the author of *What's Right with Islam: A New Vision for Muslims and the West* (HarperCollins Publishers: 2004) and *Islam: A Sacred Law: What Every Muslim Should Know about the Shari`ah* (Threshold Books: 1999).
- Ali Mazrui is the Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities and the director of the Institute of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton University, State University of New York. He is the author of over twenty books, including *The Power of Babel: Language and Governance in Africa's Experience* (University of Chicago: 1998) and *Cultural Forces in World Politics* (James Currey and Heinemann: 1990).
- Louay Safi is the executive director of the Islamic Society of North America's Leadership Development Center (ILDC), Plainfield, Indiana. He is the author of eight books, including *Tensions and Transitions in the Muslim World* (University Press of America: 2003) and *Peace and the Limits of War* (IIIT: 2001).
- Mahmood Mamdani is the Herbert Lehman Professor of Government at the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University. He is also the Director of the Institute of African Studies at SIPA and author of the award-winning book *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton University Press: 1996). His latest book is *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (Pantheon: 2004).
- Hakan Yavuz is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Utah, and is the author of *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford University Press: 2003) and, along with John Esposito, the editor of *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement* (Syracuse University Press: 2003).
- Taha Jabir al-Alwani is the president of The Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences and holds the Imam al-Shafi'i Chair in Islamic Legal Thought. He is the author of *Al-Ijtihad wa al-Taqlid fi al-Islam* (Legal Reasoning and Imitation in Islam) and *Adab al-Ikhtilaf fi al-Islam* (The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam).

Questions Asked in the Debate

Question 1: Various commentators have frequently invoked the importance of moderate Muslims and the role that they can play in fighting extremism in the Muslim world. But it is not clear who is a moderate Muslim. The recent cancellation of Tariq Ramadan's visa to the United States, the raids on several American Muslim organizations, and the near marginalization of mainstream American Muslims in North America pose the following question: If moderate Muslims are critical to an American victory in the war on terror, then why does the American government frequently take steps that undermine moderate Muslims? Perhaps there is a lack of clarity about who the moderate Muslims are. In your view, who are these moderate Muslims and what are their beliefs and politics?

Question 2: The Muslim world is experiencing a period of turmoil. At the heart of this turmoil is the debate over the role of Islam in Muslim society, particularly in its political sphere. At one extreme there is secular despotism, which seeks to dominate Muslim societies, and at the other extreme is the specter of Islamic totalitarianism. The hope in the middle is the possible role that moderate Muslims can play in establishing Islamic democracies. Until now, theorists in the West have visualized secular Turkey as a model for the Muslim world. Is it possible to imagine that the Turkish Islamists, now under the leadership of such visionaries such as Prime Minister Erdogan, are the harbingers of moderate Islam and Islamic democracy?

Question 3: Moderate Muslims are often associated with their advocacy of *ijtihad* and the subsequent reform of Muslim practice and interpretation of Islam through its much wider and systematic revival and application. Do you think that this faith in the promise of *ijtihad* is justified? Where is reform necessary? What do you understand by the term *Islamic reform*? Can Muslims develop modern, democratic, and prosperous societies without abandoning the wisdom and blessings of revelation?

Question 4: What is the future of political Islam? Does the emergence of such radical groups as al-Qaeda and others undermine the legitimacy of Islamic movements in the Muslim world, or does it enhance their appeal? Will we witness a resurgence in the relevance and influence of such groups as the Jamaat-i Islami and the Ikhwan al-Muslimin, or will they slowly lose ground and appeal to more moderate movements? Will political Islamic movements radicalize or democratize?

Question 5: The growing presence of Islam in the West has clearly reached strategic proportions. Transatlantic relations are being mediated by the strength of Muslim minorities in Europe. There is a growing and influential Muslim community in North America. Some scholars and experts see Islam in the West as a threat to the West, while others see it as a potential bridge between the West and the Muslim world. What impact will Islam have on the West and Islamic-Western relations? Is the future of Islam and Muslims in the West in danger?

M. A. Muqtedar Khan
Guest Editor

Errata:

We would like to rectify a mistake made in the last issue. In our “review essay” section, the author reviewed the following books: *Race, Gender and Culture Conflict: Debating the African Condition (Volume 1)* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004) (not *Africanity Redefined: Essays of Ali A. Mazrui*), and *Governance and Leadership: Debating the African Condition (Volume 2)* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004), both volumes edited by Alamin Mazrui and Willy Mutunga. We apologize for this oversight on our part.