MUSLIM POLITICS AND U.S. POLICIES:
PROSPECTS FOR PLURALISM AND DEMOCRACY IN THE
MUSLIM WORLD

THE PEW FORUM ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE AND
THE INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND WORLD AFFAIRS

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2003

FOURTH SESSION:
"MUSLIMS AFTER 9·11"

JOHN R. BOWEN, WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY:
"MUSLIMS AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE"

MICHAEL G. PELETZ, COLGATE UNIVERSITY:
"MALAYSIAN MUSLIM POLITICS AFTER 9·11"

ROBERT W. HEFNER, BOSTON UNIVERSITY:
"MUSLIM DEMOCRATIZATION AND ANTI-
DEMOCRATIC VIOLENCE IN INDONESIA"
MR. HEFNER: I’d like to invite John Bowen to the podium. John is the director of the Program in Social Thought, the Washington University in St. Louis, and he has the distinction of being a recognized and really quite celebrated scholar of Islam both in Southeast Asia, in particular in Indonesia, and also in Europe. That is surprisingly rare in the field of in-depth anthropological study of Islam. John is going to be talking about “Muslims and the Future of Europe.”

JOHN BOWEN: Thanks for that introduction. I do have to say that Dale Eickelman is recognized for his work in many more places than I’ll ever be able to work.

I want to touch on one particular theme and I will make two basic points with respect to Muslims in Europe. The theme is this: All the issues surrounding the relationship between Europeans and European governments and Muslims are bound up with crises of integration that have been going on at least since the 1970s in Europe. And it makes the question very, very different from the way in which these issues are posed elsewhere, and particularly in the United States. The European situation is quite different from that in the U.S.

Many of the Muslims now in Western European countries arrived there during the post-WWII economic boom. They were welcomed, or at least tolerated, as people who were willing to shut up, stay single, live in poor housing conditions and work for cheap. This attitude changed during the 1970s, when economic times weren’t so rosy, and there was increasing resentment regarding their presence. This fueled various nativist political reactions, with which you are no doubt familiar – the National Front, for example, in France. And finally, their children began to come of age and began to demand the rights of full citizenship.

These crises of integration developed in very particular ways in different countries, because each country’s experience of Islam and of Muslims has had to do with its colonial past and its neocolonial present, as well as its very particular political system. So, for example, in the United Kingdom, many of the immigrants were people coming from South Asia: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Often whole villages or parts of villages were transplanted to particular parts of cities in England in particular. Many of these people spoke English well, knew English culture, and began to become very active and often very effective in building up local ties with school boards, community boards and indeed even electing Muslim representatives to Parliament.

The situation was very different in Germany, where Turkish guest workers after a while became people who would rather not just be guests but settle in and become citizens, and it raised a whole set of crises about citizenship. The crisis in Britain focused around race relations early on and finally religious ones; those in Germany, around issues of citizenship – others, too.

France, again, was quite different. Muslims coming to France in the ’50s and ’60s and thereafter came first and foremost from what had been part of France, not a colony – Algeria, a part of France until 1962 – and from the former protectorates and colonies, especially in North Africa, also in West Africa and the Indian Ocean. And there the crisis
really became quite different. It became one of how to maintain a secular public life when Muslims were demanding recognitions as Muslim citizens who wanted to be in public Muslim as well as French. That crisis continues.

Just yesterday, reported in this morning’s papers in France, the minister of Social Affairs, Francois Fillon, suggested that perhaps Muslims who insist on wearing recognizably Islamic dress in public should be denied naturalization. That’s rather radical. It’s hard to imagine such a suggestion being posed in the United States, in the United Kingdom, or really, I think, in any other European country. Some of the Scandinavian ones are trying hard to catch up.

In any case, these crises of integration make the European experience quite different from that of the U.S. You’d have to imagine that our concerns about international networks of politics, terror, funding, guns, that sort of thing, were attributed to the Spanish-speaking population of the American South west. That might be a closer comparison. Indeed, the political scientist Ari Zolberg once remarked that the place of Islam and Muslims in Europe is occupied by the place of Spanish and Spanish-speakers in the U.S.

I want to stress three kinds of processes that are taking place in Europe that involve Muslims adapting to the very distinct conditions they face in each of the European countries: they are political, having to do with representation structures; they are social, having to do with creating new forms of identity, of social identity; and they’re religious, having to do with rethinking the place of Islamic norms in a place like Europe, and more specifically places like France, et cetera. And I will only speak of France for reasons of time.

In France, the strong emphasis on centralization, nationalization, domestication of everything, including Islam, led to the creation last spring of what’s supposed to be a national-level representative body that will really be the basis for an Islam of France. But ironically – and the French are both ironic and full of ironies – this creation was just as much a matter of foreign policy as domestic policy. Indeed, there are three major organizations of mosques – federations – that contested these elections. The head of one of them is the rector of the Paris Mosque, Dalil Boubakeur. He was summoned back to Algiers to explain himself when he didn’t do very well in the elections. The minister of the Interior – mind you, the Interior – congratulated himself publicly on having gone around to all the embassies to make sure that each embassy got their people to go out and vote in the elections. And this is how you construct an Islam of France.

But I want to stress the two other processes here. One is creating a new social identity, or sets of social identities, and the other rethinking religious ideas. There’s really a two-fold transition process taking place in each of these countries, and it has to do with moving form a home-country identity to one that is both Islamic and civic. And here’s where our questions of scaling up forms of social capital and creating new social networks in these countries really hit home.
Moving from a home-country identity to an Islamic identity, what could that mean, since these people come from Muslim countries: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Mali, et cetera? Well, what it means might be best understood through the words of one woman who was interviewed. A young woman who had recently taken on Islamic dress – the headscarf, which of course is the flashpoint in all these discussions in France – said, “It was France that allowed me to discover what Islam was. I could read books, I could go to assemblies, I could go to conferences.” And these are attended by masses of people, especially young people, all the time, all over France.

This is something Dale Eickelman has written about, and Bob Hefner and others, the importance of reading about Islam for thinking about Islam in a new way, one that is detached from tradition, from the past, from the home country, from all those things that young, chic, French women want to abandon. So even the way of tying the headscarf signifies that it's not the old country headscarf, if there indeed was one, but a new, French, modern sort of Islam. This is ironic, since it's precisely wearing those headscarves which gets those girls kicked out of schools on grounds that they're being oppressed by their parents, when for many of them in fact it's a way of standing out, differentiating themselves from those boring, old-country, un-understandable traditions.

How do you make this civic as well as Islamic? There are three kinds of institutions, among others, where that process of civicizing, if you will – you shouldn't will; a terrible phrase – Islam is taking place. One, of course, is in public schools. I've been involved – as one gets involved in the field – with helping one man, Dhaou Meskine, who is also the leader of the Council of Imams, get his school project approved by the French government. It has taken a long time – now there's a second one in Lille – for any Muslim schools to be recognized by the government as offering an education that can be acknowledged as legitimate. But what schools will do in France, as more and more of them are accepted, is provide places for parents to send their children where normal national curricula are offered, where there's some concern for the child's welfare, and where a whole host of afterschool activities – summer camps, et cetera – are offered. But it's also a place in which the Islamic and the civic can be taught together, as indeed laws guarantee they will be in France.

A second place where this is happening are new spaces for discussions and debates. Let me mention again another friend of mine, Larbi Kechat, who runs, in the 19th arrondissement in his mosque, a series of probably 10 or 12 panel discussions every year. He's done this for a number of years, on subjects ranging from jurisprudence, a bit more specific, to things like faith among Christians, Jews and Muslims, to topics like AIDS, delinquency, drugs and things like this. These panels attract largely Muslim audiences, but they always have a number of non-Muslim speakers. I've been one myself on a panel dealing with jurisprudence.

In this way, he tries to bring together both Islamic experts brought in from the Middle East, places where people are thought of as having the real authority, and more ecumenical or even secular topics such as some of the ones I talked about, giving equal weight to authorities from the non-Muslim and the Muslim worlds, or communities, or networks.
A third way this is happening is through social and political coalition-building. One of the ways in which Muslims come together is in local communities, either seeking support from politicians for their projects – building a mosque, for example – or constructing slates where, in the future, they will be able to have such support. South of Paris, in Bagnolet, I followed the very successful efforts by a group of Muslims to tip the balance in favor of one of the candidates for mayor in return for promises not of mosques – they already have one – but of more attention to jobs, to schools and to security. Here's one of the key signs of the Islamic and the civic coming together when a whole range of problems are brought up by these groups.

Finally, rethinking Islamic norms in the context of Europe: Who's doing the rethinking? It's Muslim public intellectuals across Europe. These are, by and large, in the vast majority, not people who would be recognized as ulama, as accomplished scholars with the right pedigrees in countries such as Egypt or Morocco or Saudi Arabia or Indonesia. They're people who probably have had some Islamic training, many in different countries, either their own country or in another – very often Saudi Arabia, for reasons of funding.

But let me mention a fellow named Tareq Oubrou, for example. Tareq Oubrou was the imam of the Mosque of Bordeaux who was trained as a biologist. He's had some training in Islamic sciences, but he calls on others to join him in rethinking Islam. Dhaou Meskine, who I already mentioned, came from Tunisia. He had a traditional training in jurisprudence. He's the fellow that runs that school that just got approved, and now he's been starting a new nighttime and weekend higher level training institution to train people in Islamic sciences. Some of them are part of the political structure. Akhmed Jabala, for example, is part of this elected council, and those people tend to have relationships to a Europe-wide council of research on fatwa, which has links to Yusuf Qaradawi in Qatar, the Egyptian authority living in Qatar. But many others, and indeed, by and large the most popular, have no relation to these new, established political structures. Rabi Kashat and Tariq Ramadan, the Swiss-born grandson of Hassan Al-Bana, are the two people most often mentioned by young people in France as people they would like to follow – people they think will create new forms of Islamic sociability in thinking – and they have nothing to do with these government-sponsored structures.

What are those new ideas? They both involve new ways of thinking about norms and new ways of thinking about the Islamic community. We've talked about Muslim societies today; well, what do you talk about if you live in Europe? What's the Muslim society? Is it where you live? Is it Morocco? You go back to Morocco, it doesn't look so great; you might have more freedom of worship in France. So where is the Muslim society?

People are developing thoughts in two directions, I think, to make a lot of complications a little more simple. One way is to think about Europe as something that's exceptional, where conditions of necessity mean that you have to loosen up Islamic norms a bit. This is the position that Yusuf Al-Qaradawi has taken by and large on the European Council of Jurists: You're not supposed to take out mortgages because they
involve interest; well, in Europe you have to take out mortgages because otherwise you’re in the projects and your kids don’t have a good education, so you’re allowed to do it. That’s one direction of thinking. Many criticize this as making of Muslims a permanent minority – people who are permanently an exception.

So they sought other ways of rethinking texts in ways as to allow them to create Islamic norms that are also civically and legally European norms. For example, some of these people ask what a marriage is. Many Muslims in Europe don’t think that a civil marriage has any religious status. Tariq Ramadan has said, for example, that a marriage in Islam is a contract, it involves agreement. When people go before a mayor or an official in city hall, which is what you do in France, they’re agreeing to a marriage, so Islamically they are married. Tareq Oubrou, for example, asked, “What’s the nature of sacrifice?” People have a great problem in France finding a place to kill a goat, and what you do with the blood is a problem because it’s against the European hygienic regulations and all that. So Oubrou points out that sacrifice is about giving up, so let’s think about other ways to do that.

The jury’s out on who will win these arguments. There will probably be many different solutions. But my point, and this was my second main point – the first one being that these are about crises of integration – is that we need to take seriously these internal debates, these serious thoughts about religious matters.

I want to follow on that last question from the last panel, about how we relate what happens among Muslims to what happens among Christians, for example, in terms of religious thinking and politics.

I happened to fly out here with my congressman from Missouri, who is a born-again, evangelical Christian; a very nice man, very articulate, very thoughtful. We disagree on all matters politic, but since he was going to Iraq soon for a fact-finding mission, he said, “Well, tell me about Islam. Isn’t it true that the church runs the society?” I realized I had some work to do, but we had an hour and a half. So I said, “You tell me how you understand Christianity.” And he talked to me about the Bible and debates about how we interpret verses for today; one way of thinking is to think about when these verses were first set down, what God had in mind and what we would do with that now.

And I said, “You’ve got it. If you think about Islam that way, forget all this stuff about whether church and state are separate, all these little phrases and questions. Think about it the way you just thought, and talk to Muslim thinkers about how they think about scripture, and you’ll be much farther ahead than most of your colleagues, because Muslims are thinking about scripture in the same way. What do we do with the historical conditions under which certain verses were set down, under which the Prophet Mohammed did certain things? How do we then think about our conditions now and how we ought to think about Islam?”

So my final message is, we have to take religion seriously. You folks in the media, stop reporting just on the political side. Get involved, listen to, ask questions of the
religious thinkers. It’s only by following these internal debates, understanding them, and, if we wish, supporting certain among them, that we’re really going to have an impact on developments with Islam and among Muslims in Europe or elsewhere.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. HEFNER: Thank you, John. I could hear Melissa Rogers’ choir singing in the background when you said that you in the media have to take religion seriously. We are, after all, the Institute and the Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life. And again, I thank you, Melissa, for giving us this opportunity to work with you.

Michael G. Peletz, from Colgate University, and I go back a number of years, and I usually introduce him by telling some personal anecdotes, but he made me promise that I’d dispense with that. So I will introduce him just as he is, as the leading American scholar of Malaysian Islam. Michael Peletz is going to be talking today about “Malaysian Muslim Politics after September 11th.”

Michael.

MICHAEL PELETZ: It is an honor and a privilege to be here today, and I appreciate the opportunity to address you.

In the aftermath of September 11th, Americans began learning about areas of the Muslim world that had previously escaped their attention. One such region is Malaysia, a Muslim-majority nation in Southeast Asia with an ethnically diverse population of about 24 million people. Americans have begun to appreciate that Malaysia’s significance on the global stage is much greater than the country’s demographic girth might suggest at first glance. One set of reasons for this is that Malaysia is among the most successful of the non-Confucian Asian Tigers and has sustained a pace of rapid development that is probably second to none in the Muslim world. Another reason is that Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir has successfully projected the Malaysian case as an emulable model for other regions in the world. He has frequently claimed, for example, that the Malaysian model of growth-led development that is simultaneously informed by transcendent Islamic values and “smart partnerships” linking the civil service, the private sector, and political leaders is a preferred alternative to Western-style development in other Muslim-majority nations and in much of the southern hemisphere as a whole. Mahathir’s messages have been well received in many quarters, both at home and abroad. This is partly because in the course of a mere generation or so, Malaysia has catapulted itself into the slender ranks of Muslim countries with appreciable middle classes and burgeoning, if still precarious, civil societies.

Western government sources and media accounts have suggested that much has changed in Malaysia since September 11th. While they have not questioned earlier reports about the country’s stunning economic transformation, they have suggested that Malaysia has become a hotbed of terrorist activity. They’ve also suggested that large
numbers of Malaysia's Muslims are violent militants who share the same general sensibilities as Muslims associated with organizations like al-Qaeda, Hamas and Hezbollah. In light of my earlier comments about Malaysia's significance on the global stage, these suggestions, if true, would indeed be cause for alarm.

One of my objectives today is to dispel erroneous impressions of the latter sort. In particular, I want to emphasize that despite the existence of small numbers of extremists associated with fringe groups like Kumpulan Militan Malaysia and Jemaah Islamiyah, most Muslims in Malaysia continue to be moderate, democratically oriented, and friendly to America, though increasingly alienated by U.S. foreign policy toward Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, and, indeed, most parts of the Muslim world.

Another related objective is to underscore a two-fold thesis. The first part of the thesis is that there are many different varieties of Malaysian Islam, each of which is keyed to a different set of intellectual currents and is reproduced and disseminated by different constellations of institutions and socio-political, economic, and other dynamics. The second part of the thesis is that the majority of the contests over Islam and other key symbols and institutional resources in Malaysia are occurring in relatively democratic ways. More specifically, the majority of these contests are occurring through elections, court battles, educational outreach, legitimate lobbying efforts, P.R. blitzes, letters to the editors of local newspapers, and so on – not by means of disappearances, torture, assassinations, bombings, or coup d'etat.

A more general point worth reiterating is that the vast majority of Muslims in Malaysia are not at all that concerned with positioning themselves against the West. More pressing than any such inter-civilizational clashes, to invoke Samuel Huntington's problematic terminology and prophesy, are the struggles over which contested vision of Islam should prevail in Malaysia in the present and the future. The key debates, and certainly the ones that are most intensely felt, in other words, bear on intra-civilizational clashes, not those of an inter-civilizational variety. The same is true of neighboring Indonesia and many other areas of the Muslim world, as some of my colleagues today have already made clear.

A partial but extremely important exception to my generalization that the majority of the contests over Islamic and other symbols and institutions are occurring in relatively democratic ways has to do with the ruling political party known by its acronym UMNO (the United Malays National Organization), which is headed by Prime Minister Mahathir. Mahathir deserves much credit for Malaysia's stunning economic transformation over the past few decades, and certainly merits inclusion among the burgeoning ranks of the Muslim world's relatively progressive leaders. But he also has a well-deserved reputation for ruthlessness both in his dealings with rivals and detractors and in his willingness to subvert democratic systems of checks and balances when it serves his interests.

In sum, while Mahathir is a relatively secular nationalist who has succeeded in institutionalizing a moderate and relatively pluralistic Islam, his commitment to democratic principles as understood in the West is frequently honored in the breach.
Those involved in the development of U.S. policy toward Malaysia have long known this, as evidenced by U.S. censure of Mahathir after his sacking and jailing of Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim on largely bogus charges of sodomy and corruption in the fall of 1998. The American pressure exerted on Mahathir from the time of Anwar’s arrest through the summer of 2001 had a salutary effect; for it forced Mahathir to begin restoring the integrity of the secular judiciary and other institutions that he had undercut in order to strengthen his hand and weaken his rivals.

In the aftermath of September 11th, however, the Bush administration effectively dropped all such pressure in its efforts to enlist Mahathir’s support for its “war on terror.” One result is that the past three years have witnessed increased repression and a serious constriction of basic freedoms and civil society as a whole. Another result is growing hostility to America from intellectuals, professionals, and supporters of opposition parties, including the Islamist party known as PAS (the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party). As some of you know, PAS controls the reigns of government in two of the 11 states in peninsular Malaysia, claims over 1 million registered voters nationwide, and seeks the radical expansion of Islamic law and the creation of an Islamic state. Also significant is that, in contrast to UMNO, PAS has a reputation for clean government and a clear commitment to the electoral process, though this is not to suggest that party leadership has embraced, or would in the future promote, a culture of democratic pluralism.

As should be clear, one consequence for Malaysia of the U.S. government’s war on terror is increased repression and a polarization of the electorate. A more basic point is that U.S. foreign policy toward Malaysia is an extremely important variable that informs Malaysian political and religious developments of all varieties. To phrase this in yet more general terms, the actions and pronouncements of U.S. political and religious leaders concerning Islam, Muslims, Muslim-majority nations and Muslim minorities in this country all figure into the way that Muslims in Malaysia respond both to U.S. concerns and interests and to those who are believed, rightly or wrongly, to represent them within Malaysia.

Various policy recommendations are implicit in what I have said thus far. At this juncture I will be more explicit and will make six policy recommendations. Due to the constraints of time, I will not be able to elaborate or to clarify the interconnections among the various dynamics to which I allude.

First, U.S. support of the Mahathir regime and its successors needs to be far more conditional than it has been since September 11th. It needs to be contingent on the prime minister restoring the integrity of the secular judiciary, attacking corruption among the police and throughout the civil service, and expanding the space of civil society. This, in turn, means devising strategies to strengthen the judicial and legislative branches of government and doing away with the dreaded Internal Security Act, which Mahathir has long used to intimidate and bludgeon his rivals and detractors. Some of this might be achieved by promoting the creation of multinational commissions of constitutional lawyers, judges and others who can work with their progressive Malaysian counterparts within both the secular and the religious branches of the legal system. Failure to make
such progress will convince fence-sitters and others that secular governance is morally bankrupt and incapable of delivering social justice. Such failures will thus drive more of the electorate into the camps of PAS and could encourage youth in particular to heed the clarion calls of extremist groups like Kumpulan Militan M alaysia and Jemaah Islamiyah.

Second, the U.S. should play a more proactive role in promoting other types of professional exchanges, including exchanges involving university students. Among other things, we should offer to send those with expertise in conservation and deforestation to predominantly rural areas like Kelantan and Terengganu, which are under the control of PAS and, not coincidentally, have been very much marginalized by state-sponsored development and modernity.

Third, the architects of U.S. policy need to take seriously all varieties of M alaysian Islam, as well as the intellectual resources and cultural-political dynamics that help motivate and sustain each and every one of them. This means listening carefully to and engaging in constructive dialogue with Islamic scholars and men of learning, and developing a better understanding of the writings of key intellectual figures such as, to cite but a single example, Syed M uhammad N aquib Al-Attas, who has provided intellectual inspiration for a wide range of Islamic organizations and movements. It also means making common cause with progressive M uslim feminist groups like Sisters in Islam, who have forged strategic alliances with the government, but are nonetheless deeply committed to the development of a principled, inclusive, and pluralistic Islam that offers great promise for the future of an expansive democracy in M alaysia.

Fourth, those involved in the forging of U.S. policy need to give the highest priority to the establishment of a viable Palestinian state, which is an issue dear to the hearts of M uslims in M alaysia as, of course, elsewhere. They also need to devise a framework to make meaningful reparations to the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians whose livelihoods and homelands were destroyed by the creation of Israel in 1948. Failure to resolve these issues in a meaningful way will prolong all sorts of problems with global repercussions. Talk about Middle Eastern roadmaps and the like is cheap, or not, depending on how one views the $4 billion plus a month we are currently paying for the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq. Immediate action on this front is essential.

Fifth, we need to repeal the U.S. Patriot Act and similar initiatives along with discriminatory visa and immigration requirements for travelers from Muslim countries. The Patriot Act conveys a clear message to M uslims throughout the world that M uslims in this country, along with Sikhs and others who supposedly look like them, are people of second-class standing who do not and should not be accorded the rights enjoyed by the non-Muslim majority. The Patriot Act also provides powerful ammunition to autocratic leaders like M ahathir, who utilize it to rationalize repression in their own countries. M ahathir has, in fact, claimed that the U.S. got the idea for the Patriot Act from M alaysia’s Internal Security Act!

M y sixth and last recommendation concerns education. The need for education about Islamic history and civilization and the Muslim world generally is more crucial
now than ever before. Education requires funding: funding for the study of Malay, Indonesian, Bangla, Hindi, Urdu, Pashtu, Dari, Farsi, Swahili, Arabic and the hundreds of other languages spoken by Muslims in Asia and elsewhere around the world. It is imperative that the American public and Congress alike be much better educated, especially since pressure from the electorate and congressional leaders obviously shapes both domestic and foreign policy. Failure to fund educational initiatives bearing on the languages, cultures, and histories of Muslims will surely reproduce the insularity and ethnocentrism that have long underlain American perspectives on Islam. The key question, in any case, is not whether we can afford such education. It is, rather, can we continue to pay the price for neglecting it?

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. HEFNER: Thank you, Michael. I am the last speaker today, but we will have time for a few minutes of discussion afterwards.

I want to talk today about a kind of political paradox, or what might look like a paradox or irony. The irony is that a country, Indonesia, which in many regards several years ago was regarded as a leading center for the development of a civil and pluralist Islam, fully on par with Iran today, that country today doesn’t get the credit that it deserves, because it saw its civil Islamic tradition decline or experience a severe crisis in the aftermath of President Suharto’s departure or downfall in May 1998.

Indonesia is the largest Muslim majority country in the world, with some 89 percent of its 215 million people professing Islam. But because of the recent decline in its civil Islamic tradition, Indonesia may well never get the credit that it deserves as one of several leading examples for the development of the civil and pluralist Islam at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. And perhaps more negatively, but very seriously, post-Suharto Indonesia serves as an example of the difficulties of scaling up a civil or a pluralist Islam in situations where those social-political pacts across the state-society divide break down. And this is, I think, the punch line, so to speak, on Indonesia. Armed extremists are able to exercise an influence vastly disproportionate to their numbers in society, and in so doing are able to scale up a decidedly uncivil version of Muslim politics.

From 1999, shortly after Suharto’s downfall, to 2002, battles between Christians and Muslims in the eastern portions of the country took some 9,000 lives. It was awful sectarian violence. Equally alarming, in the months following Suharto’s resignation in May ’98, radical Islamists paramilitaries, not all of them directly involved in the later violence, sprang up in cities and towns across the country. Although after Suharto’s departure civil Islamists and democratic nationalists had hoped to press for further democratic reforms, by late 1998 – really just a few months after Suharto’s downfall – they found themselves decisively outflanked and outgunned by the radicals, groups that had previously been very small in numbers and influence.
Many of the radicals made no secret of the fact that they had close ties to powerful patrons in the ancient regime, the old order, new order; that is, the Suharto government. Indeed, several of the country’s largest and most active paramilitaries, some of those that were most directly involved in the violence in eastern Indonesia – which, again, took 9,000 lives and created more than a 1 million refugees – like the Laskar Jihad, a group that I’ve worked with, and then the Islamic Defenders Fronts, made no secret of the fact that they had very cordial ties to prominent retired and/or in several cases even active members of a faction of the armed forces. And it was a characteristic of the breakdown of the political pact in the aftermath of the Suharto regime that the military itself became extremely factionalized.

The rise of elite-backed Islamist paramilitaries, then, from this perspective, had less to do with any kind of deep rooted immoderation in the larger Muslim community than it did with the fact that the political elite at both the local – I have to emphasize – as well as the national level had gotten used to neutralizing its opponents by inflaming sectarian passions in society and then mobilizing support along ethno-religious lines. Indeed, political elites, both at the local and the national level, had gotten so used to this “sectarian trawling” that even Christians in those parts of the country that had Christian majorities, particularly in eastern Indonesia, didn’t hesitate to engage in the same awful pattern of political mobilization along ethno-religious lines.

Now the good news here – there is good news – is that after the Bali bombings in October 2002, the moderate Muslim majority’s repugnance at the scale of the Bali killings converged with what, in comparison with some of the cases we’ve heard today, was a fairly subtle international pressure to bring about a decisive shift in the balance of power among rival elites, again, at the local and national level. However unhappy Indonesia’s current situation, this cooperation led to the cessation of activities on the part of several of the paramilitaries linked, again, to members of the old regime, particularly the Islamic Defenders Front, FPI, and the Lasykar Jihad. So in this case, the history of Indonesia in the post-Suharto period, and particularly after the Bali bombings, is an example of American policies that have largely succeeded in their goal of working with Muslim moderates to contain elite-sponsored extremism. On a day when perhaps we’ve heard too few examples of relatively effective U.S. policies, the post-Suharto American policy in Indonesia has, I think, been surprisingly effective.

But there is glum news, of course, coming out of Indonesia as well. Thus far I’ve been referring to Islamist paramilitaries sponsored by members of the old regime. However, the Indonesian and American governments’ cooperation in dampening elite-sponsored paramilitarism, like that of Laskar Jihad, only made more apparent that there was a second stream among the armed Islamist groupings; a smaller one, but one that was entirely independent of the backing of local political bosses, whether in the military or elsewhere. The largest of these groups is the group that we’ve come to know of most recently in the aftermath of the Bali and the Marriott bombings, namely the Jemaah Islamiah.

During the late 1990s and early 2000, al Qaeda and the Jemaah Islamiah’s role in Indonesian religious violence was really minor compared to that of the domestically
sponsored, that is the elite-backed, paramilitaries that I talked about a moment ago. Very few of the thousands of people killed in the religious conflicts in Indonesia – eastern Indonesia – from 1990 to 2002 were victims of Jemaah Islamiyah paramilitaries.

Since the Bali bombings, however, the JI’s role has become more apparent, precisely because the other paramilitaries, those linked to powerful domestic patrons, have for the most part retired. Now a little bit on the JI here. The JI is quite different from, for example, the situation that Qasim described of fundamentalists or armed Islamists in Pakistan, who draw on a fairly large and broad, if still segmentary, base of support. The JI is much smaller, and it’s always been smaller. It originated in the 1990s when several hundred militants traveled to camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan to receive guerilla training and to engage in jihad.

These years coincided with the expansion of al Qaeda into Southeast Asia, which was very small, but, again, very influential. Jemaah Islamiyah and al Qaeda are most certainly distinct organizations, and, indeed, they are more networks than they are associations. Nonetheless, from 1995 on, the two groups did coordinate their campaigns for the bombing of American and Western targets.

In the mid-1990s, when other hard-line Islamists were reconciling with President Suharto, the JI leadership remained among the regime’s and the military’s most vigorous critics. This fact helps to explain why the JI has never been given a cordial reception, even in the ranks of the military or old regime officials involved in the sponsorship of Islamist paramilitaries.

Ironically, the Bali bombings in October 2002, and the Marriott bombings in August of this year, appear to have been a serious blunder as far as the JI’s long-term tactical interests are concerned. The violence dispelled most moderates reluctance to accept U.S. claims that terrorist networks were operating in Southeast Asia. And prior to Bali, there was enormous resistance to American accusations that there was anything like the JI operating in the country. There still is some skepticism, but it’s greatly diminished by comparison with before. I just got back in July from Indonesia, visiting madrasas, and throughout my travels I was struck by the sea change in public attitudes on the question of the Jemaah Islamiyah’s existence.

The struggle to contain the Jemaah Islamiyah is far from over, and, in fact, I think further terrorist violence is virtually certain. But the JI’s effort to radicalize the Muslim community as a whole has been dealt a severe, perhaps even fatal, blow by its own actions.

But this failure is as yet insufficient to allow a sustained scaling up of the abundant Muslim resources for civility and pluralism that Indonesia commands. Indonesia’s economy is moving again, yes, but not sufficiently to grow the middle class, invest in education and bring about the pluralist social and political landscape on which sustainable moderation depends. A central feature of successful – if I can use this awkward phrase – civil societization in Muslim countries is the effort to contain the authoritarian impulses of a radical minority by demonstrating the compatibility and
benefits of pluralism and democracy to the Muslim majority. In this way, moderate Muslims civilize—in the civil society sense of that term—the patriarchal and authoritarian tendencies of armed conservatives not yet enamored of the idea of modern pluralism.

In the case of Indonesia, the economic collapse of 1997-1998 converged with a crisis of state and the very skillful tactical use of ethno-religious violence by a small but unfortunately influential minority. All these things combined to make this moderating project, the civilizing project of moderate Islam difficult. The project is likely to continue to remain difficult for a few more years, not least of all because Indonesia’s political crisis continues, although in a somewhat different form.

From a policy perspective, however, Indonesia is a prime example of the need for U.S. and Western policymakers to recognize the importance of working on two policy tracks. Indeed, I would say, again, I think U.S. policy and the current ambassador, not least of all, in Indonesia is keenly aware of this. So there is good news from a policy perspective.

The first track is short term; it involves efforts to contain terrorist violence and radicalism generally by demonstrating the threat that it poses, yes, to Western, but especially to Muslim interests. Terrorism does pose a dire threat to Muslim interests. It threatens Muslim civilization. It threatens long established patterns of Muslim civility.

The second track is the one that we tend to lose sight of in the sound and fury of battle today’s war on terrorism: Namely, to continue to make global economic policies and local economic investments, especially in education, women’s welfare, legal institutes, and yes, independent businesses. Through all of these things, a pluralist middle class with a vested interest in religious freedom and social pluralism can take hold and it can begin to exercise that civilizing influence by demonstrating the very real and immediate benefits of public civility and tolerance for ordinary Muslims as a whole.

Unfortunately, however, for the moment, Indonesia is not Iran or Turkey, even in the most basic social or economic terms. It remains a low-income country with a small and extremely vulnerable middle class, and perhaps most problematically, a political system still prone to extreme ideological factionalism and sectarian trawling. The country still has an unusually rich tradition of moderate and pluralist Islam. In this sense, there is the paradox: An unusual abundance of civic pluralist resources, but as a result of the collapse of anything that might leverage a social pact across the state-society divide, an inability on the part of moderate Muslims to scale up those social resources into effective governance and a pluralistic and tolerant civil society.

Thank you. I think we have just a few minutes for questions, either for this panel or for anyone.

**Q:** Hi. Kumar from Amnesty. On Malaysia again, as you are aware, the Malay votes are evenly divided pretty much between PAS and UMNO, and Mahathir is leaving, I think, next month. What impact is that going to have on this? There are tendencies
that PAS is going to pick up more votes from the Malays; as a result UMNO is going to depend on Chinese, Indians, and some Malay votes, but what's your read of that?

Thanks.

**MR. PELETZ:** As reluctant as I am to make policy recommendations, I am even more reluctant to read the tealeaves and predict the future. All I can give you is an unsatisfactory answer: it will depend a lot on Western policies in the region, actually. Western policies towards the Philippines, Western policies towards Indonesia, U.S. attempts or interests in creating a regional counterterrorism center in Malaysia and so on and so forth.

It's difficult to predict. I suspect that things will continue much as they are in many, many respects. Badawi, you know, was handpicked by Mahathir. He's not going to – I think anyway – veer radically from the direction that Mahathir has set the country on. However, he does have a reputation for being more squeaky clean and so forth. But that's the best I can say, I think, at the moment.

**Q:** If you could maybe elaborate a little bit more. In earlier meetings you talked about the deterritorialization of Islamic schools of law and the interesting things going on in the diaspora about religious law. I'm just wondering about two things. One, if the religious establishments that are more in the Muslim world are also developing more transnational links or the balance of power might be moving, as there is a lot more action and innovation in the diaspora. Maybe you could give us a little bit more of a sense of this, especially, as you say, in France, some of the religious authority is trying to be more institutionalized, and so what effect does that have?

**MR. BOWEN:** It will have to be just a little bit; such a complex question. I'll just mention two examples. The question has to do, if I can expand on the question a bit, with, on the one hand, recognized authority on these matters – matters of Islamic norms, Islamic interpretation – is not located in Europe. I mean, most European Muslims look elsewhere for the ultimate authority on things, and they won't accept one of these French or British or others simply telling them what's the case. They want to hear from people like Yusuf Al-Qaradawi. They see him on television all the time, on Al Jazeera. They want to know what Al-Azar thinks, et cetera, et cetera.

On the other hand, they are promoting in everyday discussions in, say, France, about how to interpret Islamic norms that are, in the eyes of some of those established authorities, radical and dangerous and need to be squelched. So one sees sometimes quite a bit of conflict. On several occasions I've heard people coming from various places in the Middle East – Syech al-Bouti, for example, from Syria, who came to Larbi Kechat's mosque and, speaking in Arabic (this is one of these interesting things; these authorities generally are speaking in Arabic) – denouncing what he called a fiqh al-maqasid, which is a jurisprudence based on principles of the Koran, which he says is to give up all we've accomplished over the centuries in establishing Islamic jurisprudence, et cetera. He was really, really angry about what some of the Europeans were saying. So there's this sense...
of, on their part, I think, we are the established authorities, but we don’t quite have the control over what’s going on in France or elsewhere in Europe that we might like.

Q: Thank you. I am new to this. My name’s John Utley, Mises Institute, but you all are so expert, listening to this. Do you all get called upon by anyone in the administration for this kind of knowledge? My impression, and I’m involved in politics here, is they have no one who knows much about these kinds of things affecting our foreign policy or anything. But I’m serious, do you or your friends who are experts in these fields get called upon and so on?

MR. HEFNER: The working group on Civic Democratic Islam, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, has a large proportion of people who are regularly called on by the government, but it is not a government body. When it comes to government policy itself, particularly at the level at which we have input, one is struck by the plurality of views that is inevitably reflected in the government policy analysts’ discussions. I’m not trying to take issue with you, but it’s not quite as uniform or unitary as it seems outside. There are quite lively discussions and, inevitably, a political process unfolds as well. That is the nature of the link between the political realm and the policy realm; that is, policy analysts’ suggestions and recommendations get discussed, and they are gradually filtered through other considerations, and whether we agree with the outcome or not, there is nothing unusual about that. That’s how the link between policy and politics is conducted in all modern societies, so therefore I wouldn’t fault analysts.

I want to end by just thanking the working group. Thank you very much. And now thanking Melissa and her staff for allowing us to work with you and doing such an extraordinary job. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MS. ROGERS: I want to thank you for coming. I know I have added a lot to my knowledge base today, and I appreciate the time that I know the scholars took to come from all different points on the map – perhaps in perspective, but all certainly in geography. We’re very glad that you took time to be with us today. And we’d like to help dig the grooves even deeper between policymakers here in Washington and these folks who have done so much, so that maybe we need to arrange more plane rides for people next to their congressman and things like that.

MR. BOWEN: Figure out how to get us good seats. They usually have them.

MS. ROGERS: (Laughs.) We’ll try to be as inventive as we can in that regard.

I want to also say that this is the first of what I hope will be many efforts of the Pew Forum to look at some of these very complex and challenging issues. As I think Bob mentioned at the beginning of the day, he was thinking about this before the attacks of 9/11, but after the attacks, it’s much easier for us all to make the case that it’s actually critical that policymakers understand religion when they go to make policy, and so we
hope that this will be an entrée into more discussions in Washington and beyond, but particularly here, about these very complex and challenging topics.

I want to thank Bob particularly for his leadership and for conducting the sessions so admirably today, and I want also to thank our staff who worked very, very hard on this. Particularly Sandy Stencel Heather Morton, Grace McMillan, Kirsten Hunter, Brody McMurtry and Stacy Simmons Waldvogel. So thank you to the staff.

(Applause.)

And thanks to each of you. Please stay in touch with us as we continue to explore these topics. Thank you.

**MR. HEFNER:** Thank you.

(End of event.)