




# ISLAM & THE WEST

Dialogue of Civilizations in Search of  
a Peaceful Global Order

Editors:  
Chaider S. Bamualim  
Dick van der Meij  
Karlina Helmanita





## **Islam & the West**

Dialogue of Civilizations in Search of a Peaceful Global Order

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## Preface

*Murni Djama1*

This book, which the Pusat Bahasa dan Budaya (PBB) of Universitas Islam Negeri (State Islamic University) Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, is presenting to the reader, originally derived from papers and discussion materials presented by participants during the International Seminar “Islam and The West, One Year after September 11, 2001: Obstacles and Solutions in Search of a New World Civilization” that was held in Jakarta on September 11-13, 2002, and was organized by the PBB, the Indonesian-Netherlands Cooperation in Islamic Studies (INIS), and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS).

Speakers of international repute came from as far as Germany, the United States, Egypt, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, the Netherlands, and of course, also from Indonesia. They believe that the WTC tragedy in New York on September 11, 2001, has shown the world how weak and fragile the relation between “world civilizations” is. The speakers and participants during the discussions in the seminar believed that lasting peace can only come from an attitude of mutual understanding and appreciation based on a firm belief in our common nature, common interests, and common destiny.



Bassam Tibi, for example, believes that “terrorism”, which occurs in almost every part of the world, is not just a nightmare. It is a reality. All people of the world, be they Europeans, Americans, or Muslims, have to fight together against terrorism in order to ensure world peace. This means that the United States cannot and should not unilaterally carry out this task. The fight against terrorism will need a long time and an appropriate strategy. The causes of terrorism should be studied objectively, because some of these causes may have a relationship with existing socio-economic, political, or cultural injustices in the world.

A great many ideas have arisen from the discussions in the seminar. Of course, there were agreements and differences of opinion among speakers and participants on several topics, and on ways of explaining, and responding, to various questions raised. These have, as a matter of fact, enriched our experiences and have increased our understanding of the causes of conflicts, and also about what terrorism and the fight against it are all about.

The three-day seminar, which took place in the Jakarta Inter-Continental Hotel, reached some remarkable conclusions. The participants believed that Islam (or religion) did not play any role whatsoever in the September 11, 2001 tragedy in New York. They also stated that under guidance of religious values, humanism, and pluralism, any move towards political, religious, social, and cultural democratization will strengthen the voice of the people in government, parliament, and society at large. To them, the duty of religious people remains emphasizing the importance of religious tolerance and persuading decision makers to uphold equal opportunities and pluralism.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to all of those who have made the above mentioned international seminar possible, including the Rector and staff of UIN Jakarta, the speakers, their sponsors, such as the Indonesian-Netherlands Cooperation in Islamic Studies





(INIS), and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), presenters, facilitators, as well as all the people at PBB and UIN for their support. Our special thanks go to KAS for its financial assistance without which this book might not have been published.

Jakarta, November 2003  
Director of Pusat Bahasa dan Budaya  
UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta





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## Preface

*Norbert Eschborn*

**I**nternational Politics, by definition, means politics beyond cultural borders. Its success depends, largely but not solely, upon its ability to build bridges between different cultures, to find ways of inter-cultural understanding, and to conduct a dialogue on ethical, religious, and political issues in order to identify both the differences and the mutual interests of all parties concerned.

In the course of the tragedy of September 11, 2001, the criticism expressed in Islamic societies of Western politics toward the developing world became particularly vehement. Therefore, after the terrorist attacks dialogue with Islamic countries has gained crucial importance. Its relevance lies less in a dialogue on culture and religion but much more in an early identification of conflicts in politics and society, which are being justified by cultural or religious differences.

In Europe, the image of Islam is increasingly being characterized by negative clichés, which point to an inherent potential of Islam for terrorism and violence. At the same time, widespread distorted images of the West and its “imperialist interest” have experienced a revival in the Islamic world where




they favor anti-Western ways of thinking and acting. Such patterns of perceptions not only fail to understand a cultural region as a phenomenon rich in facets, but simply see the other culture as a monolithic enemy.

With the neighborly relationship between Islamic countries and the “West” having been neglected for much too long, considerable religious and cultural tensions have developed. This is being underlined by the regenerated debate whether Islam really has a place in the modern age. The process of culture and religion being increasingly politicized in the Muslim world has been driven by the doctrines of radical Islamic preachers who make their faith instrumental for political purposes by propagating “Islam as the solution for everything”. As a consequence, a development process has been taking place, which encourages the emergence of a simplistic paradigm “Islam versus the West”.

It is, thus, necessary to counter the approach of cultural antagonism with the perspective of cooperative coexistence. Consequently, finding pluralistic ways of understanding each other’s culture, and social and political history is an indispensable condition of this strategy. It should be implemented with the help of a dialogue with Islamic countries and societies, which seems to be the appropriate instrument for this purpose. Dialogue cannot only place special emphasis on cultural similarities but also identify areas of possible confrontation between western-Christian and Islamic basic principles.

For these reasons, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) has traditionally been attaching great importance to inter-cultural dialogue as it considers it to be of decisive significance for all people worldwide living together peacefully. For many years and in the framework of its international cooperation projects KAS has dedicated itself to the dialogue with Islamic states and societies.




In view of the growing tensions between Western and Islamic cultures there is, however, an urgent need not only to intensify the dialogue with the Islamic world but also to review its conceptual basis and adapt it to the changing conditions of world politics if necessary. It should not be ignored that criticism of so-called “cultural dialogues” mainly concentrates on this form of communication being elevated to become the subject of the dialogue itself. An open and honest discourse, however, must go beyond superficialities and platitudes.

Equally damaging for the dialogue’s credibility would be to limit it in geographical terms, e.g. to the Middle East region, as is often done. Such an approach would neglect the fact that the largest numbers of Muslims live in South and Southeast Asia. Especially there, innovative solutions for the above-mentioned problems have been developed which can be made applicable to other Islamic societies.

Islam as a political or religious phenomenon is very diverse. One could go as far as to say that there is no such thing as Islam but only Muslims who practice it. Most probably, there will be no effective political strategy toward political Islam as long as we try to explain Muslim behavior on the basis of Islam only. What is important is to understand the concrete political, social, and economic conditions under which Muslims live. The future of political Islam will be determined by both the developments of these indicators and of the relationship between the West and the Islamic countries.

It should be emphasized that in Islamic countries a very broad range of opinions and standpoints are expressed concerning the relation between state and religion as well as between individual and society. This refers also to human rights and democratic political participation: strict opposition to democracy on one side, support for building a civil society on the other, including sympathy for the strict separation of



religious and political spheres. The lesson to be learned is that not all ideological concepts of Islam are anti-Western or characterized by an appeal for violence. Radical political Islam, which uses violence as a political means to achieve goals in domestic and foreign policy, has so far been supported only by a marginal number of Muslims. We in the West, therefore, are well advised to identify all the forces in politics and society in Islamic countries, which support democracy, human rights, and social justice.

This publication would not have been possible without the extraordinary intellectual contribution of the group of international authors. All are deeply committed to a world where Muslims and non-Muslims can live together peacefully in a spirit of tolerance for other cultures and religions and deserve our respect and gratitude.

Prof. Dr. Azyumardi Azra, Rector of the Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN), was a driving force behind this project and did a great service to all Muslims in Indonesia and to their image in the world. It has been a pleasure to cooperate again with UIN's Pusat Bahasa dan Budaya, especially with its director, Drs. Murni Djamal, MA. His careful direction guaranteed a successful project result. I also wish to thank Sukron Kamil, M.Ag., Project Manager, and his team who managed the task of transferring the outcome of a fruitful conference into a useful book for academics and the interested public.

Last but not least, my heartfelt thanks go to Lia Yulianingrum, Evy Kurniawati, Amalia R. Satochid, and Sarah Sabina Hasbar of KAS Indonesia for their invaluable dedication to a worthwhile task.

Jakarta, November 2003  
KAS Representative to Indonesia





## Introduction

*Editors*

This book appears two years after the event of September 11, 2001. Therefore, it is important at the outset to state that the book may in some parts be somewhat outdated. For instance, in some places it precludes to a possible outbreak of a war in Iraq, which we all know has happened and, is in fact already over by the time this book sees the light. This is unavoidable in a book about events so current in a world, which, at present, is constantly threatened by similar actions as the September 11 events. In the light of new acts of terror having taken place after September 11, such as the Bali Blast of October 12, 2002 (death toll more than 200, hundreds injured) and the blast at the J.W. Marriot Hotel in Jakarta of August 5, 2003 (death toll 13, more than 50 wounded) and the ongoing conflict in the Middle East – not to speak of the wars waged by the US in Afghanistan and Iraq – many of the articles have gained importance as each in its own way tries to address the various issues at play in the terror and how to understand and cope with them.

As the editors do the editing, on August 25, 2003, Yahoo.com quotes Reuters that bombs have just exploded in Bombay killing 44 people and leaving 150 injured. These





bombs are also believed to be the result of religiously inspired violence. It is as yet unclear who the perpetrators are but they need not be Muslims, although the Indian Deputy Prime Minister seems to have no doubts about this. As Elizabeth Collins notes in her contribution, religiously inspired terror is not a prerogative of Muslims alone!

This book is a collection of papers and other contributions presented during the International Seminar on Islam and the West, One Year after September 11, 2001, which was convened in Jakarta, September 11-13, 2002 by Pusat Bahasa dan Budaya (the Center for Languages and Cultures), UIN Jakarta in collaboration with the Indonesian-Netherlands Cooperation in Islamic Studies (INIS, main sponsor) and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). The reader will see that each of the participants has chosen his or her own angle to discuss the topic. The subject range is therefore large and varied and of course each author is responsible for his or her views and the way he or she has chosen to present them.

By way of introduction, let us highlight a few notions, elaborated in the book, which in our views are important.

First of all, the role of the media is dealt with in a number of contributions. The role of the media is seen as crucial in the way people understand notions of the Islamic and the Western worlds. These notions, in part are creations of the media themselves, which do not necessarily reflect real, existing entities. They are often conjured up in order to (over)simplify the way the world is. In fact, these notions may, or perhaps, should, be seen as often downright misleading. They oversimplify the world in such a way that the great variety found in both the Islamic and the Western worlds are fully ignored. Muslims tend to think of the West as one, big, vast entity in opposition to the Islamic world, which is portrayed in much the same way for Western consumption. The role of







media is crucial in this image building and their role should sometimes be viewed as highly suspected one.

Inadvertently, the media are equally responsible for the negative view many non-Americans have about the United States and its inhabitants. Misconceptions about the nature of the US and its culture in the Islamic world are matched by those held by US (Western) nationals about the Islamic world. There is no country in the Western world, which is so religiously inspired as the United States. But, the idea about the West, including the US as prevalent in the Islamic world is that people in the West do not adhere to religion anymore. On the other hand, the populace of the Islamic world is portrayed as solely concerned with religion – most specifically its negative aspects – which of course is also not the case. Stereotyping the world in this way only leads to dehumanization, the danger which should be avoided.

The role of the media in emotion-building can also not be underestimated. The number of times we have seen the twin towers collapse cannot be counted anymore. Moreover, as has been noted time and again, the first impression on anybody's mind when seeing these towers go was that they were watching a film. Apparently the US has been able to imprint violence in people's minds in such a way that violent acts are perceived as fantasy first, before they may be considered as real. We have not even mentioned the role of the media in sensation-building. We see the towers crash all the time, the Pentagon plane is much less shown and how about the fourth plane which crashed in Pennsylvania? Nobody seems to feel it worth mentioning anymore, whereas the tragedy of the people in this plane was no less real.

As the event of September 11, 2001, took place in the United States, the US appears to have gotten, perhaps has put too much emphasis on it. The other countries of the West have also had their reactions to this tragic event. The Islamic world



has physically penetrated the West and vice versa. Muslims live all over the world, including in the West and Westerners live in the Islamic world. Western cultural traits have become everyday reality in the Muslim world and also in the West the Muslim world, Islam, and Islamic culture are given more attention than ever before.

In the West the issue of the West and the Islamic world is studied and discussed from all possible angles by scholars, journalists, diplomats, and politicians alike. The book signals that this is not the case in the Islamic world, where the study of other Muslim countries, let alone of the West, is limited. This is to be regretted and needs to be addressed if both are to understand each other.

We should be careful not to turn fantasy into facts. Geographical notions do not reflect distinctions in reality. Talking about two worlds is misleading anyway; after all, we all share the same planet. It should be noted that the West is described in a more diversified and detailed way compared to the Muslim world, which is seen as more of a totality.

A book like this cannot exist without paying attention to the notion of globalization. This term, reverberating in any discussion on world order—or disorder—is used—and misused—all over the globe. Globalization may be viewed as the perpetrator of Huntington's "clash of civilizations", the notion which also gets attention and criticism in the book. Whether or not a clash really exists, it is frequently perceived as a reality and thus, is a notion that needs to be dealt with.

Other subjects dealt with in this book include the nature of terror, its perpetrators—among them the Taliban and Osama bin Laden—, the situation Muslims face in the West after September 11 and many more. The most important conclusion to be drawn from reading this book is perhaps the necessity of dialogue on all segments of society, be they political, cultural, or otherwise. Only if the world is prepared to listen



to the “other” will the world be able to cope with, and eventually avoid, tragedies such as September 11, 2001.

Jakarta, November 2003

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