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university of cooperative education | staatliche studienakademie

The Conflict Between Western World and Islam

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**Dennis Landscheidt
Stephan Wollny
WIBI 02AGR**

**Tutor:
E. Machado**

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Table of Abbreviations

cf.	confer
p.	page
pp.	pages
i.e.	<i>id est</i> : that is
id.	<i>idem</i> : the same
cp.	compare
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> : for example
et al.	<i>et alii</i> : and others
UN	United Nations
US	United States
Vol.	Volume
AD	<i>anno domini</i> : After Christ

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"My ideological commitment is total and the reward of glory for this relentless battle is to be called a terrorist. I accept the name of terrorist if it is used to mean that I terrorize a one-sided system of iniquitous power and a perversity that comes in many forms."

-Kamel Daoudi, Algerian member of al-Qaeda

1. The Ambiguity of the Islam

The Islam has always been a misunderstood topic for the majority of Germans. On the one hand people assume that Muslims suppress their wives, which is also a result of the polygamy, Islam allows. Examples for these assumptions are several Turkish coffee bars, which can only be visited by male Muslims, or the fact that Turkish women walk behind their husband. Another prejudice is that the Islamic law includes the cut of extremities as punishment for committing (cf. Raddatz 2002, p.9). On the other hand Islam means peace and submission to God. Lobbyists say that it would be a tolerant religion and protects minorities. As a matter of fact they claim that their religion even is peace.

Nevertheless, since September the 11th the connotation of non-Muslims with Islam has changed totally. It is sometimes seen as a menace. People think of fanatic Islamists willing to bomb themselves in order to kill other human beings in favor of their God. These stereotypes and generalization are a great danger of misunderstanding and misinterpreting this religion. The religion becomes the reason for all conflicts between Muslims and Christian cultures for instance. While the Iranian president speaks of "a dialog between civilisations" as a way to find solutions, this declaration has usually been translated as "a dialog with the Islam" in Germany (cf. Reissner 2003, p. 22). This illustrates that Germans already tend to make religion responsible for terrorism, destruction and murder.

To get rid of all stereotypes and misunderstandings it is absolutely necessary to explain what Islam really is and how it is defined.

2. The Islam – State and Religion

2.1. The History

The Islam was founded by Mohammed (Abu 'l-Kassin ibn 'Abd Allah) and is derived from the Arabic word "aslama" ("to submit to").

Mohammed was born around 570 AD in Mecca as the son of an average family of the Koraish tribe.

In 610 AD he reported an encounter with the Archangel Gabriel who informed him about the religion's prayers, religious rituals and explanations of rules and values of behavior. Later on, they were printed in the Koran, the Islamic Holy Scripture, and is still valid today. After his visions he started to propagate this religion and especially its monotheistic principle, which is a core point of it. According to his beliefs the only God who exists is Allah, which was not accepted by his tribe, and he was persecuted. He fled to another city, namely Medina and was accepted as a leader. He was quite successful, and had the possibility to conquer Mecca in 630 AD. He founded his own state, consisting of Medina, Mecca and some surrounding Arabic areas. One of the most essential facts is that the Islam's founder Muhammad also had an own state to teach his religion. After his death the Islam experienced a great period of success. Iraq, the Nile Valley, North Africa and even Spain became Islamic. Jerusalem (Islamic: Al Kuds, the holy city) was also conquered, it is even of importance as Mohammed was said to ride with his horse Burak from a cathedral to heaven (cf. Bednarz et al., p. 141). Jerusalem today is a holy place for Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This is one reason for the latest, bloody fights in Middle East.

The crusades stopped this success and even destroyed the built-up empire. In Jerusalem, the fights were extremely hard, all Muslims were killed. This mass murder provoked an immense Islamic rage, which even today seems to be existent, as Jihad is justified by these incidents. The core elements of the Jihad will be evaluated at a later point. Consequently it does not seem to be adequate when George W. Bush, the US president,

speaks about a crusade against terror (cf. id., p. 144). On the contrary! An increase of anger and a trend to fanaticism was the result.

2.2. The Islam Today

Nowadays, nearly two billion people are Islamic, i.e. about one fourth of the world's population. Islamic countries are shown on the map below.



Figure 1: Islam Worldwide

The religion influences all aspects of life, as value judgement and rules of behaviour are seen as a divine instruction, Mohammed received. Islam is said to be a religion as well as politics (*din wa daula*) (cf. Reissner 2003, p. 27). As all rules and laws were set up by god, there is no discussion or philosophical interpretation possible, but the inaccurate formulation of the Koran allows multiple interpretations. Muslims have to accept all commandments, rules and values as they are Allah's rule. This is one reason why Muslims often cannot agree with Western laws. They are usually not based on religion. If all German laws were based on Christianity for instance, it would make much more sense for Muslims to obey them. The Koran itself even deals with the treatment of women in a quite detailed way, i.e. Muslims have to treat their wife (or wives) in the way it is described in the Koran, because it is Allah's way of behaviour. Polygamy is also allowed, but limited on four different wives and only possible if financial and social conditions are fulfilled. Hence the different point of view, Germans have, with regard to this treatment, can be

explained by religion and should never be evaluated as a suppression of women just because they are not used to it.

Duties, Muslims have to fulfil in order to be faithful are

- ritual prayers (Salat), five times a day with an obligatory body position and time of day
- the Ramadan rules, which is the month of fasting
- the pilgrimage to Mecca

One of the most difficult interpretations of Islam is the question whether all human actions are determined by Allah or by their individual responsibility. In this question it is splitted into Sunni and Shia, where the former lays the emphasis on the determinism of actions. Nevertheless both, Sunni and Shia, admit the possibility of adopting initiatives in such a way that they can expect reward in heaven (cf. Dülfer, p. 148). Mohammed came also to this conclusion when saying it to a soldier, who died later on in a successful fight in an almost hopeless situation. Fanatic Muslims interpret this as a validity for suicide assassinations.

2.3. The Islamic State

The second difficult topic is the connection between state, politics and Islam. Which form of state is the most appropriate one?

Some years ago there was often a confusion between Islamic politics and Islamic political semantic. Leaders of Islamic states often use the expression "Islamic socialism" or "Islamic democracy", however their politics cannot be described as Islamic. It is just semantic, but not a factual Islamic system.

After the Iranian Revolution in 1979 for instance, which should ensure the community within Muslims (Umma) in international politics, Iran, which totally applied Islamic political semantic, and Saudi Arabia could not cooperate as they had different views on the Islam and its interpretation.

Though both countries are Islamic and adopted Islamic semantic, they do not make Islamic politics as they did not co-operate.

Nowadays the application of the Islamic law (Sharia) identifies a state that is Islamic. Nevertheless the application itself does not include a definite form of state. Sharia is possible in democracies as well as in monarchies. But it is a question of Sharia's interpretation whether it can be applied in a democracy. In Iran for instance the political leader insists on the interpretation that democracy and Sharia are often in conflict, just to assure his power (cf. Reissner 2003, p. 28). Iran has also shown that the unity of religion and state cannot protect its inhabitants from state.

On the other hand it is important to consider that Muslims are limited in independence as it is partly assumed that their action is determined. Consequently structures of authoritarian-hierarchical structures are needed.

Summing up you can say that the form of state depends on the interpretation of Koran and Sharia, no generalization is possible. Some states seem to be Western oriented, for instance Turkey, whereas Iran totally adopts a traditional Islamic way of thinking.

3. Islamic Fundamentalism

3.1. *Fundamental Cultural Differences*

Fundamentalism cannot just be explained by the Koran or a religion in itself. Actually trying to find the reasons for terrorist attacks such as the one from September 11th in the Koran would be playing down the thread as well as fooling the reader (cf. Kermani, p. 55).

The conflict between the US, as representative for the Western World, and the Iraq, as representative for the Islam is a prime example for a political conflict in the modern world. The Islam as a combatant for justice and the US as a fighter for freedom represent the battle between normative and cognitive cultures.

Justice is a normative category, which depicts the social rules in a community, as well as the counterpart to individual wants and needs. Furthermore by using the word "just" we associate it with what is meant to be "right."

Freedom on the other hand relates to the possibilities of the individual. Out of the cognitive potential of an individual evolved the identity of the human being. Thus we identify with freedom the personal space we can use to perform independent actions without the interference from anybody else.

Neither the concept of freedom nor the concept of justice can exist without the counterpart. Any culture includes both concepts since they are interdependent, but cultures differ in how each concept is valued (cf. Krieg, p.28).

Especially in the past cultures tended to rely more on the normative part of "justice" since this concept has been praised in the foundation of any old religion. In the course of time even Catholics abandoned the relatively pure normative thinking in the course of the reformation started by the Protestants. Over time science as a cognitive part of everyday life became an essential part of our lives. We can even see the shift in our legal system from normative to cognitive concepts. Whereas in former times banishment or ostracism were considered some of the worst punishments

as an exclusion from society, today people are punished by locking them away, taking their freedom (cf. Krieg, p. 29).

In eastern cultures this change only happened to a slight extent, if at all. A perfect valuation of these two concepts does not exist. But in today's globalized world it is not too hard to imagine these two concepts collide. On the one hand a culture focused on personal freedom that penetrates the boundaries of any culture in order to expand and strive for new discoveries in technology or science. On the other hand a culture that values social interaction and a divine justice above anything else. Now Western companies enter their markets, driven by the will to develop new technologies. In a world, where the productivity of markets is determined by the state of technology Islamic countries just cannot compete. Consequently high unemployment is a problem these countries have to cope with. In a normative way of thinking the people is strengthened in its view of Western countries exploiting less developed countries, which is an injustice in itself and thus has to be dealt with (cf. Krieg, p. 30). This difference results in conflicts that find their climax in events like September 11th or the Iraq war. The further evaluation, of the reasons, why Islamic fundamentalists resolve to such, in our view, terrorist acts, will be dealt with in the next chapter.

3.2. Reasons for the "Holy War"

The "Holy War" as a translation for the "Jihad" is quite misleading therefore it will be dealt with in an own part of this paper. However the question remains why Islamic fundamentalists see a reason to attack other cultures in such a drastic way. As pointed out above terrorist acts can by no means just be looked for in the Koran and the statement that all Islamic people are terrorists is wrong as well. Nevertheless due to the inaccurate statements of the Koran as well as the fact that it involves a tradition that is about 1500 years old contribute to the fact that the Koran can be evaluated in completely different ways. Therefore it is hard to depict the passages that encourage violent actions against other religions. This

paper will try to describe the relation between the Islam and other religions as pointed out in the Koran anyway.

According to the traditional law system of the Islam the world can be divided into two parts: The Islam (dar al-Islam) and the area of war (dar al-harb). While the Islam is described as the realm of peace and the state of God, the other part is the country of the nonbelievers. Now the Muslims have the duty to defend their country and help to establish the law of God in the other countries as well (cf. Khoury, p. 49). The ultimate peace can only be achieved when the borders of the Islamic state cover the borders of the whole world and all people live in one Islamic society (cf. id., p. 50).

It is quite important to point out that the Islam does not totally reject Judaism or Christianity, since they have made encounters with God as well. As a normative culture however it is hard to understand the way Western cultures live, as they do not seem to live by the rules "God sent them." According to the thinking of a Muslim Jews as well as Christians have the duty to live by the rules of God, otherwise they fall under the category of nonbelievers as well (cf. id., p. 46).

According to the Koran history tells us that we have not been living by the rules of God, which depict the "right" norms of behavior. Instead the cognitive cultures followed their own soul, which instantly results in something evil. Humans have above all practiced disbelief, disgrace, and resistance against God's will. Thus the Koran wants the human beings to change their behavior (cf. id., p. 47).

Considering the influence of the Koran and the difference of cognitive and normative cultures capitalistic governments like the US, who seem to have completely abandoned the norms preached in the bible, are the "prime evils" of the Koran. As a representative of technological enhancements, its consumption orientation, open world-wide communication, its liberality, and the mobility the US is seen as an intruder to the normative, social oriented world that is trying to influence the Muslims to follow their lead. Islamic Fundamentalists see themselves in a defensive fight against the threat of losing their own values (cf. Krieg, p. 30).

3.3. *The Islamist Movement*

Islamic Fundamentalism is just like the Islam itself a multifaceted phenomenon, which differs depending on the region and the time. It is usually practiced by only a small number of people that represent a minority almost anywhere (cf. Ende, p. 11).

Islamist demand "Islamization" or "Re-Islamization" of society and state (cf. Khoury, p. 55). The model for the real Islamic state is the community lead by Muhammad in Medina (622-632) as it corresponds to the will of God and grants Muslims the fulfillment of their religious duty. This once more emphasizes the strong interdependency of state and religion in the Islam (cf. Ende, p. 13). Living according to these standards includes the abolishment of laws concerning the manner of living that were introduced into numerous Islamic countries in order to comply with the standards of the modern world. Fundamentalists see these laws as a loss of their Islamic identity (cf. Khoury, p. 55). The models of an order thought of by Muslims are seen as superior compared to the democratic models of the West, as they are models thought of by men, instead of a model that involves both state and religion, which has been depicted by God. The technological enhancements of the Western world have arisen at least as many problems as they solved and are therefore not to be seen as a blessing (cf. id. p. 56).

Concerning the question why Islamic fundamentalists seem to be more effective today than before this has numerous reasons. One might be globalization where cognitive values were introduced to the normative world. Parts of this thinking were adopted by Muslims and older values began to be doubted, but without ever establishing a stable order. The system of the West was not able to solve the problems of their system due to the resulting disappointment Islamists preach of the return to the roots. Tradition could prove to be the answer as a "new" foundation of their country. The combination of state and religion promises to bring welfare in every sector (cf. id., p. 58).

However, disappointment in the political system from the West was not the only reason for the growth of fundamentalist groups. Western industries

penetrating local markets results in the crowding out of the bourgeoisie. Furthermore in the rural areas agriculture cannot feed the population anymore, which results in depression and dissatisfaction. Another factor is high unemployment. New school systems that have been introduced by the West have created a mass of alumni, unfortunately the system was not good enough therefore their degree is not sufficient for most international companies. Thus every year new students enter the labor market without finding work. The resulting dissatisfaction is then projected onto the Western system (cf. Ende, pp. 20-25).

The idea of finding ones own way to cope with the problem of a political system is not a problem by itself and should probably even be encouraged. Unfortunately the propagated state systems often have a totalitarian aspect. The own visions are seen as absolute and will be enforced by the means of violence if necessary. This violence is most of the time even used to suppress the own people but in the case of Islamic fundamentalists the imagined form of state often involves the active war against the disbelievers. To justify their actions the "Jihad" is more and more used (cf. Khoury, p. 60).

To just have the appropriate number of followers is not the only thing that is need for a "successful" terrorist movement. Terror needs the social and political foundation in order to operate as freely as it would like to i.e. social movements that protect the group and preferably even countries that support it. Al-Qaida has/had these networks, which makes it differ from the other terrorist movements. Osama bin Laden claims to fight for the suppressed people, for the ones in need of help, that feel exploited and mistreated by the West. This fact itself would not make these groups resort to violence but they can identify with the cause bin Laden propagates (cf. Kermani, p. 56).

3.4. The "Jihad"

The roots of the Jihad can be found in the Koran. It would be wrong to say that the Islam does not have anything to do with the Jihad, but in praxis it

can show with different faces. Actually Jihad refers to an act of an individual. The proper translation would be more like "to endeavor oneself" and not the "Holy War" used in the Western press. It is supposed to describe an action that is in accordance to God and his will. The aim of this action is the defense of the Islam. Even though some theorists argue that it is a purely defensive action, history cannot really proof that since only few events can be clearly identified as a defensive Jihad (cf. Ende, p. 24). The Jihad promises a reward to those that either die and/or are successful in a fight in accordance to the will of God. The battle is only to end once the enemy is defeated (cf. Khoury, p. 37).

Other than an armed Jihad there is also the option of a spiritual Jihad. It comprises of the inner battle against other and therefore wrong teachings and against ones own desires. In the Islamic tradition this one would be known as the "Big Jihad" in comparison to the armed "Small Jihad", but this is a conclusion drawn over time and cannot really be proven in the Koran. It does not really matter though since the fundamentalist theorists do not deny the importance of the spiritual Jihad, but the armed battle against disbelievers is always seen as superior.

In order to show how broad the meaning of Jihad can be interpreted consider the following example out of the political world, where a leader proposed a "Construction-Jihad" to workers of voluntary movements in order to release them from their abstinence and work more efficiently (cf. Ende, pp. 25-27).

Conclusively the Jihad does not necessarily involve an armed battle, so drawing conclusions just by what is propagated by the media can be misleading. Nevertheless the association of Jihad involves weapons or a fight against disbelievers most of the time in the minds of Muslims as well, but not exclusively. Since the 60s the Jihad has found its way into the world of fundamentalist movements. It actually is the foundation of an armed, revolutionary battle that involves terrorist methods (cf. Ende, p. 31).

4. The Current Situation of Terrorism

4.1. Recent Terrorist Attacks

*"The device of flying fire will come
to trouble the great besieged chief:
within there will be such sedition
that the profligate ones will be in despair."*

(Nostradamus, Century VI, Quatrain 34).

Whether Nostradamus' Quatrain can be interpreted as the events of September 11th or not, the world has changed and fundamental Muslims started to fight as terrorists against Western democracy in such a way that all states are threatened. Since March 11th terrorism has arrived in Europe and it seems to be a question of time until other European cities, e.g. London will be victims of Islamic violence. Terrorism nowadays takes place, nearly everyday, especially in Iraq and in Israel. However, the acts of terror mentioned in figure two are the ones, which had the greatest effect on many Western citizens, as the victims were mostly civilians of Western states like Germany, Spain, Australia and USA.

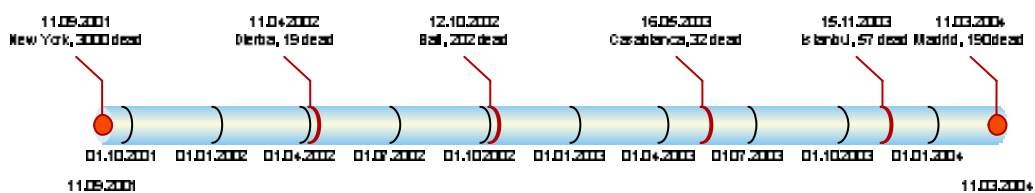


Figure 2: Timeline of Terrorism

The real threat of this terrorism is however the fact that everyone can become a victim. There are no specific or chosen victims like politicians any more, only civilians. Anxiety itself is seen as a success (cf. Ertel et al., p. 144 -146). If their attacks have any influence on everyday life they have succeeded. Unfortunately one has to admit that all attacks were very

efficient and had the wished consequences. The last bomb attack in Madrid for example resulted in the fact that the election shortly afterwards, had a different outcome than expected, due to these cruel attacks. Spain is going to withdraw its troops from Iraq, which was definitely the central aim of March 11th. The new quality of religious terrorism is characterized by the fact that it is not only a fight against democracy, modernity and freedom of conscious. The attacks of Madrid show that every state is responsible for its fate. If they support USA in Iraq for instance they become potential victims of terrorism (cf. Cziesche et al., p. 21). Thus it becomes obvious that fanatic Islamists try to convince governments not to intervene in Islamic states to assure internal security. This is definitely a kind of intimidation and threat. The current situation of terror is obviously a consequence of the Iraq war. Thus it is indispensable to evaluate this war.

4.2. The Iraq Situation

Since the end of Iraq war the situation has totally changed. At the beginning the Iraqi population celebrated the downfall of Saddam Hussein and his dictatorship, which was responsible for the death of more than one million Iraqis. These celebrations were definitely a consequence of the languished end of this period of oppression and brutality. Nevertheless the occupying powers have never been able to take advantage of this initial positive situation. On the contrary! Their way of behaviour contributed to the current, horrible situation of permanent violence. Their arrogant occupation of Saddam's palaces is just one example. Another example is that American soldiers were more or less ignorant with regard to the Islamic religion. Being responsible for security in the country, they introduced some checkpoints, where they palpate people for weapons. Unfortunately palpating of women is seen as a disgrace, a violation of ones personal honor (cf. Reuter et al., p. 38), which directly leads to revenge. All foreign troops are seen as occupying powers and strangers, in contrast to Saddam Hussein. That is why some Iraqis are willing to fight and even willing to die to free their country (cf. id., p. 39). The dismissal of

all 400,000 Iraqi, former Saddam Hussein's soldiers supported this tendency as they faced enormous social problems and could not get used to their new situation. They began to resist against the invasion.

However, these examples are the reason for some attacks, but the majority has its origin in Islamic fanaticism (cf. id., p. 42). Consequently one has to make a distinction between violence based on religion and the one based on dissatisfaction of the Iraqi compatriots.

With regard to this distinction it is of importance to mention that most of the suicide assassinations, experienced in the last month, were executed by foreign Jihadis, Islamists fighting in the Jihad, from states like Saudi Arabia, Iran and Syria. Up to 97 percent of the Iraqi population is actually against these acts of terror. Their situation has improved since the downfall of Hussein's dictatorship, though they are not totally happy with the occupying powers.

Religious fanatics are not impressed by military defeats. It seems that they do not face reality, but come closer to their god (cf. Mohr et al., p. 51). For religious fanatic groups like Al-Qaida, Iraq has become the centre for their Jihad. That is why they send their Jihadis to Iraq. For them the invasion of this country is a crusade against their religion. To stress this important aspect again: the majority of terrorist acts are realized by extreme religious groups. These groups do not just operate in their centre of interest, the Iraq (cf. Reuter et al., p. 44), but also in the countries of the invaders. Thus potential victims are Poland, Italy, Netherlands, USA, Great Britain, Japan, Australia and Spain. Spain, as we have seen, has already experienced revenge, realized by these extremists, for their participation in the Iraq war. Though it is quite hard to stop terrorism in Iraq and many soldiers, mainly from the United States, die every day, a deduction of troops would result in the most unpleasant situation that would be possible (cf. id., p. 44).

It is highly necessary to find a new leader or a powerful president for this country who is able to cooperate with the population that has lived up to now under a dictatorship. A total free democracy would not work now, as the population has no experience how to behave in such a system and the traditional Western democracy does not correspond to their cultural belief.

The most important fact is that the invaders, mainly the USA, do not oblige the country the values and political system they are used to. Iraq is not a country which can become Western oriented from one day to another. On the contrary! It is highly influenced by its religion, the Islam. This must be accepted.

A fight against terrorism is always bloody and very often not successful as it is quite hard to identify potential committers. As the USA, having invaded Iraq nearly alone, is seen as the main enemy a UN mandate could help to solve the conflicts. UN is said to be neutral and hence could improve the current tensions.

Another very important measure would be to talk with the religious leaders in every city and village to create provisional, Islamic governments so that radical groups have the impression that their religion is appreciated in the right way.

To ensure that violence and extremism will not be existing in future, it is indispensable to build up an adequate school system so that children are not attracted becoming radical and learn to accept other cultures and religions. A co-existence of religions must be feasible, as it was also feasible in the last 1500 years.

5. Uncertainty of the Future

Predicting the future is an impossible task. Solutions for terrorist threats do not exist and nobody knows how long it might take until we can resolve today's problems. Even though it might seem that the Koran is the source of the terrorist attacks, hope can be found there as well. The Koran orders the believers to talk to the disbelievers, to appeal to their faith. Tolerance toward Christians and Jews is clearly described. More modern theorists even encourage Muslims to interpret the Koran in a more time bound way, since the conditions today are totally different from the ones in the first Muslim state. Back in the initial Medina state the Muslims were in a struggle fighting for their lives. According to these theorists the conditions today are totally different. The "attacks" from other cultures are not of the same nature as the ones in the past, thus the same rules cannot be applied for a fight. Instead one should focus on the statements depicting peace in the Koran, where you should grant peace to those who offer it (cf. Khoury, pp. 39). But that would be a very one sided approach, only requiring the Muslims to adapt to the West.

Projecting the problem of fundamentalists to the Koran cannot be the right way either. As described in the above sections, groups using violence in order to force their will on others is a minority. The actual problem is a misunderstanding between two cultures. The aim has to be integration and finding the balance between cognitive thinking and normative thinking that satisfies both sides. One tool could be globalization since it offers new possibilities concerning intercultural communication. But as long as it is mainly used to enter new financial or commercial markets it will most likely result in a more severe feeling of "injustice" on the Muslim side. This would result in even more conflicts.

Most likely the West will not move from its view of total freedom just like the Muslims will stick to their concept of "justice". Nevertheless each part can learn from the other and sooner or later both sides will have to accept that in the course of globalization the world will grow together to one society with multiple facets. Therefore globalization has to be seen as a

possibility to create new jobs or improve the education system. Areas of poverty have to be seen as ones own regions of poverty not "theirs" (cf. Krieg, p.33)

It must be everybody's responsibility to strive for a world where all people are treated alike. That is something the cognitive part will have to learn from the normative part from the world. Whereas normative thinkers will have to grant the individual the personal space it needs. How long this will take nobody can foresee. It will most likely even depend on the development in Iraq. Once the communication between the so fundamentally different cultures starts, dissatisfaction will hopefully diminish, thus robbing the terrorist movements of the people to recruit.

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