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Contents

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Editor's Note

4

COMMENTARIES

Surveilling and Criminalizing Austrian Muslims: The Case of 'Political Islam'

FARID HAFEZ

11

Anti-Muslim Hatred in Italy: A Glocal Issue

DOMENICO ALTOMONTE

23

Rising Violence against Muslims in India Under Modi and BJP Rule

CJ WERLEMAN

39

Modern Muslims' Online Struggle: Countering Islamophobia One Tweet at a Time

SAHAR KHAMIS

51

EU Values and Interests in the Resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: French Unilateralism

ELMAR MUSTAFAYEV

65

ARTICLES

Islamophobia, Neoliberalism, and the Muslim 'Other'

JAMES CARR

83

Contemporary Experiences of Islamophobia in Today's United Kingdom:
Findings from Ten Small-Scale Studies

CHRIS ALLEN

107

For a New Alterity of Islam in European Perspective

MARCELO MACEDO RIZO

129

The Post-September 11 Rise of Islamophobia:
Identity and the 'Clash of Civilizations' in Europe and Latin America

KRISTIN VANDENBELT

145

Islamophobia as Cultural Racism: The Case of Islamic Attire in Turkey

ALI MURAT YEL

169

Veil and Burqa in the French Public Sphere: A Feminist Analysis
MÜŞERREF YARDIM and ALİ HÜSEYİNOĞLU
191

A Decade Later: Taking Stock of the Arab Uprisings and Turkey's Role
BURHANETTİN DURAN
213

Syrian Mass Migration in the 2015 EU Refugee Crisis: A Hybrid Threat or Chance
for Implementing Migration Diplomacy?
İBRAHİM İRDEM and YAVOR RAYCHEV
235

The Question of State-Sponsored Terrorism: Investigation of ASALA and JCAG
in the Light of Available CIA Documents
BURAK KÜRKÇÜ
259

REVIEW ARTICLE

The Quest for Soviet Legacy in Russian Foreign Policy
MEHMET ÇAĞATAY GÜLER
283

BOOK REVIEWS

Exploring Emotions in Turkey-Iran Relations:
Affective Politics of Partnership and Rivalry
MEHMET AKİF KUMRAL
Reviewed by Cangül Altundaş-Akçay
295

Spiritual Subjects: Central Asian Pilgrims and the
Ottoman Hajj at the End of Empire
LÂLE CAN
Reviewed by Peyman Eshaghi
297

Beyond the Steppe Frontier: A History of the
Sino-Russian Border
SÖREN URBANSKY
Reviewed by Meryem Hakim
299

Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy
from FDR to Trump
JOSEPH S. NYE, JR.
Reviewed by Mehmet Akif Koç
302

Road Warriors: Foreign Fighters in the Armies of Jihad
DANIEL BYMAN
Reviewed by Georgi Asatryan
304

Turkey and Russia in Syria: Testing the Extremes
HASAN YÜKSELEN
Reviewed by Murat Poyraz
306

İki Darbe Arasında: Türkiye Suriye
Politikası (1960-1980) / [Between Two Coups:
Turkey's Syria Policy (1960-1980)]
NURİ SALIK
Reviewed by Bilal Salaymeh
309

Japan's Relations with Muslim Asia
BRYAN BARBER
Reviewed by Mustafa Onur Yalçın
311

The False Promise of Liberal Order: Nostalgia,
Delusion and the Rise of Trump
PATRICK PORTER
Reviewed by Celil Yiğit
313

Sufism: Theoretical Intervention in Global
International Relations
DEEPSHIKHA SHAHI
Reviewed by Feyzullah Yılmaz
315

EDITOR'S NOTE

MUHITTIN ATAMAN

Western governments emphasize liberal values and principles in their foreign relations, but only when they enjoy a competitive advantage. When governments experience crises and find themselves in a disadvantaged position, hatred, alienization, and otherization increase. This has been the case recently with the Western world knee-deep in political, social, and economic crises. As a result, they hold 'others' responsible and accountable for the problems they face, as Jews have been blamed for centuries in Europe, even in the first half of the 20th century. While trying to achieve their objectives, if they do not face a real threat, Western governments will construct one –or at least the illusion of one.

The current European governments and politicians, who face many political, social, and economic problems, try to use other states, peoples, and civilizations as a tool for their own interests. After mainstream political parties, especially center-left parties such as socialists, lost their governments and their influence in many European countries, these same countries have been experiencing the rise of ultra-nationalist movements, far-right political parties, and racist political actors. Radical and xenophobic parties began to enter parliaments, and some of them even came into power. Today, many right-wing European political actors identify themselves mostly based upon otherization and alienation of others and therefore they are strongly anti-migrant, anti-black, and especially anti-Muslim.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of communism, the Western perspective of Islam has increasingly become negative. There are many reasons

for this resurgence in vilification of Islam and Muslims over the past three decades. First, the West needs a political enemy in order to survive and to maintain its global hegemony. While for many years the 'red menace' communism has been the main target of the West, after the collapse of the Soviet Union this was replaced with the 'green menace' of Islam. Even though Muslims do not constitute a real political or military threat to the world, i.e. the West, Western countries continue to politicize and otherize Islam and Muslims as their main opponent.

Second, using an anti-Islam and 'Islamic terrorism' jargon is one of the easiest ways to assert dominance over the governments in the Muslim world. For instance, reflecting its colonial mindset, France and some other Western colonial countries prefer putschist General Khalifa Haftar, who is determined to preserve the French interests, to rule Libya. France does not want another country, such as Turkey, to increase its effectiveness in the region and contribute to alleviating, if not ending Libya's dependence on France.

Third, the political cost of using anti-Islam rhetoric is relatively quite low. Western countries could not and cannot plainly otherize other countries like India or China. The interdependence between the West and China or Russia is much stronger than that between the West and Muslim countries, making the cost for Western global powers' rifts with Beijing and Moscow quite high. Therefore, the otherization of Islam is more practical. On the other hand, it is easier to mobilize the world behind Islamophobia, since China, Russia, and especially India, which host Muslim minorities and control many historically Muslim-majority territories, have a traditional enmity against Muslim countries.

Fourth, controlling the Muslim world will determine the global rivalry between the West and other challenging powers such as Russia and China. Whoever controls the Muslim-dominated regions such as the Middle East, North Africa, the Horn of Africa, Central Asia, and South Asia will gain the advantage and become superior. By following an anti-Islam policy, these global powers find reasons to intervene in the domestic affairs of Muslim states. Even when there is no rationale, they will establish some radical terrorist organizations, in order to vindicate 'their fight' against these artificially and intentionally created non-state actors.

Fifth, since Islam and Muslims have a strong political discourse and a global reach, global powers consider them as a potential threat to their hegemony. With devoted followers all over the world, Islam is a global phenomenon and has the potential to unite influential countries across the globe. Muslims constitute the second-largest religious group, and Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world. This reality has led to an increase in the politics of fear in most Western countries.

Last but not the least; European political actors have been instrumentalizing Islam, Muslim countries and peoples for their domestic policies. In most European countries politicians have been directly or indirectly discussing Islam and Muslims during election periods. Many European politicians, especially those who are ambitious, arrogant, and populist, consider Muslims as the main threat to their way of life and the main source of the troubles they face. French President Emmanuel Macron, his rival Marie Le Pen, Dutch far-right politician Geert Wilders and Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz use the same political anti-Islam discourse. By targeting Islam, these politicians contribute to the radicalization of some Muslim groups who are ready to react to these insulting moves in the West. The more governments pursue anti-Islam policies, the more it contributes to polarization in society and consequently social and political tensions rise in Western countries.

Considering the rise of anti-Islam sentiment, Macron and France are not alone, many other politicians and countries increasingly pursue similar policies. Therefore, European political actors have mostly stood by Macron, and many European politicians have preferred to criticize Turkey and its leader Erdoğan, who has harshly criticized Macron for his anti-Islam statements. The European Union's Foreign Policy Representative Joseph Borrell said Erdoğan's words were 'unacceptable' and called on Turkey to stop "this dangerous spiral of confrontation." Similarly, Vice President of the European Commission Margaritis Schinas said that EU values prioritize 'liberties.' Similarly, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said that "hate speech targeting France by the Turkish leadership is unacceptable (and) fuels religious hatred." In other words, Western politicians did not question Macron's hatred of Muslims and Islam and considered Macron's explanations as reasonable and acceptable.

Although most European countries deny the existence of anti-Islam and anti-Muslim sentiment, the evidence on the ground demonstrates that racism and hate crimes against Muslims have become widespread and begun to normalize throughout Europe. Every passing day, racist, xenophobic and anti-Islam tendencies are further entrenched in European societies and institutions. The main concern about the most recent wave of anti-Islam is the fact that the mainstream political parties have begun to accept anti-Islam as a normal position and to use political discourses of ultranationalist and xenophobic political actors. Many Western governments have begun to introduce new laws normalizing anti-Islam outlooks in their countries. When hostility becomes commonplace and discrimination is internalized, all political codes are written accordingly, laws are interpreted similarly, and social perceptions are shaped in the same mould. The process has come to such a point that victimized Muslims are even afraid of complaining about the attacks committed against them. According to a survey published by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, only 12 percent of Muslims report anti-Muslim discrimination cases to offi-

cial. That is, the available data and numbers, which are already alarming, are only the tip of the iceberg.

Based upon the above explanations, it can be claimed that the anti-Islam trend is largely a Western product and that the Western political actors are largely responsible for the resurgence of anti-Islam activity in the world. To put a stop to this situation, European countries and EU institutions such as the European Parliament need to recognize anti-Islam attitudes as a form of racism. European actors should fight against all kinds of discrimination, racism, hate crimes, and human rights violations as they fight against anti-Semitism. The EU should initiate a de-radicalization program in order to re-establish a multicultural Europe. Europe should not surrender to far-right or far-left terrorists, otherwise it will continue to lose its moral superiority. Moreover, unless Europeans take necessary measures against anti-Islam, European states are destined to lose rationality in their policies. This wicked process is similar to a double-edged sword that cuts Muslims and non-Muslim Europeans, as well.

Lastly, in this issue, I would like to draw attention to the concept of anti-Islam, which I believe is a better concept to use instead of Islamophobia, considering that anti-Islam is a more political concept compared with the latter. The Western and non-Western perception of Islam is totally political. Countries that have large Muslim minorities consider the spread of Islam and the increase of Muslims as a threat to their political projects and their way of life. Anti-Islam, similar to any political perspective that targets all members of a religion or ethnicity, is a form of racism.

With these said, the current issue of *Insight Turkey* brings to its readers four commentaries and six research articles covering anti-Islam practices worldwide while focusing on different dimensions of these activities.

As Muslim communities have been racialized as the 'Other' for decades, James Carr provides a comprehensive analysis on how contemporary neoliberal civilizing missions operate at different levels to create neoliberal citizens, while penalizing Muslims that refuse to participate. In Europe particularly, Marcelo Macedo Rizo asserts that the depiction of Islam and Muslims has also been dominated by an 'Othering.' He proposes the application of a democratic 'Alterity' to overcome the existing harmful European vision towards Muslims.

The impact of far-right parties' activities and the governmental politics of fear, in general, have resulted in different realities that allowed anti-Muslim hatred and actions to increase. Within this perspective, Farid Hafez explains how the introduction of the notion of 'political Islam' by the Austrian People's Party came to the criminalization of vocal and/or organized Muslims. Meanwhile, in Italy, there is a lack of acknowledgment of Islam and Muslims by the Italian

state. Domenico Altomonte argues that anti-Muslim hatred in Italy allows its citizens to conceive an exclusionary populist discourse and a shared negative view that impedes the enforcement of the right to religious freedom. Furthermore, Chris Allen analyzes the existence of anti-Islam activities in the United Kingdom.

From a feminist perspective, Müşerref Yardım and Ali Hüseyinoğlu analyze anti-veil and anti-*burqa* laws in France by focusing on their historical and social foundations. However, anti-Islam is not only limited to Europe. As CJ Werleman asserts, the rising violence against Muslims in India has brought Muslims to the brink of genocide in India and Kashmir.

As mentioned previously, anti-Islam is mainly politically constructed. This can be understood better when taking into consideration Kristin VandenBelt's research which compares the experience of Muslims in Europe and Latin America, Denmark and Argentina respectively.

Media is another actor which augments anti-Islam activities and discourse. Within this perspective, Ali Murat Yel's research article brings attention to Turkish media representation of Islam and its impact on the social antagonization. Furthermore, Sahar Khamis' commentary focuses on the social media and concludes with a few thoughts on what needs to be done to ensure the success and continuation of efforts to counter Islamophobia.

Besides the pieces that cover the resurgence of anti-Islam worldwide, this issue also includes a number of articles that discuss some important issues. Burhanettin Duran, on the tenth anniversary of the Arab Uprising provides a general framework of the developments in the region. Elmar Mustafayev looks at the stance of France on the Second Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan from the angle of the norms and values of the EU. Migration has been the subject of the political developments in Europe lately. Within this context, İbrahim İrdem and Yavor Raychev examine the use of coercive engineered migration as a hybrid threat during the 2015 EU refugee crisis. Lastly, Burak Kürkçü in his article questions the state sponsoring of the terrorist operations of the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia and the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide.

At a time when anti-Islam activities are resurging and the Muslim voices are kept down, this issue of *Insight Turkey* aims to present and to provide the verity to its readers through an extensive and rich framing of the ongoing anti-Islam practices worldwide. We hope that this issue contributes to increase awareness about anti-Islam activities in today's world. ■

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