

**Govt. 433 West-Islamic Relations**  
**Spring 2008**  
**Professor Thomas Banchoff**  
**Reynolds 133, M 2:15-4:05**

**Office hour: T 4:15-5:30, or appt.**  
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## **Overview**

The topic of this course is old, new, and contested. Relations between the West and the Muslim world can be traced back to Mohammed and his successors in the seventh century. With the end of the cold war, September 11, 2001, and the “war on terror”, West-Islamic relations have a new, unprecedented salience on the global political agenda.

But what does “West-Islamic relations” mean? The term is contested. What is the “West” after all? If it includes the United States, Sweden, and New Zealand, is it a coherent entity? And a “Muslim world” that includes Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Indonesia is anything but monolithic. For critics, terms like “West-Islamic” are inaccurate and dangerous. They distort reality and can reinforce an “us vs. them” mentality.

So why a course on West-Islamic relations? Because, whether we like it or not, the “West” and the “Muslim world” are an inescapable part of our political vocabulary. The terms proliferate in political discourse and media coverage; they are reproduced in public opinion polls and in scholarly analysis. We are struck with them, just as we are stuck with other abstract concepts open to competing definitions – concepts like “democracy” and “justice.” If we approach the terms “West” and “Islam” in all their complexity, and make careful distinctions, we can better map and understand the reality to which they point.

## **Organization**

The course is organized into two main sections. A first, introductory section explores historical legacies and contemporary frames. After an overview of the Abrahamic traditions and conflicting views of Islam in particular, we will examine key historical legacies, including the Crusades and the colonial era. Bringing in history illuminates the evolution of Islam, Christianity, and the West, and the importance of that history as a backdrop for politics today. This will lead us to a critical exploration of two contemporary interpretative frameworks -- the idea of a “clash of civilizations”, on the one hand, and of a joint “Islam-Christian civilization”, on the other.

The second part of the course is devoted to key case studies. Since September 11, 2001, relations between the West and the Muslim world have been shaped by a series of critical junctures. The attacks themselves, and responses to them, marked a watershed. Subsequent controversies included the Mohammed Cartoons and the Pope’s remarks on

Islam. Through an in-depth exploration of a series of six case studies we will examine the contours of West-Muslim relations – key issues, actors, and outcomes – across a range of topic areas including terrorism, the role of the media, interreligious dialogue, the rights of minorities, religious freedom, and the status of Jerusalem.

Our course coincides with the first publication of *Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue*, a joint project of Georgetown University and the World Economic Forum. The Berkley Center is helping to craft the report, slated for presentation at the Forums' annual Davos meeting this January. Two of our class sessions will be devoted to critical discussion of gaps in the report, with an eye to improving next year's edition.

## Requirements

Class participation: 30%

Case study preparation/presentation: 30%

Research paper: 40%

This is a collaborative seminar. It is crucial that you come to class having completed – and reflected upon – the reading, and that you participate actively in class discussion.

Two 250-500 word email critiques of the *Annual Report* count towards participation, as does attendance at six Center events related to the topic of our course (to be announced).

The overall reading load is light, on average 100-150 pages per week. It is heavier during the first part of the semester, and becomes lighter as written assignments come due. All of the reading beyond the three required books for the class (Bulliet, Peters, and Goddard) will be posted on our Blackboard site. **You must bring copies of all the readings for a given day to class so that we can refer to them in discussion.**

During the second part of the semester, you will work in teams of two or three to prepare and present a particular case study, providing about five pages of written analysis. Some of the material will be posted on a dedicated course website. See details below.

The course culminates with a twenty page research paper on a mutually agreed topic. Here you will have considerable latitude. You may develop a particular case study in detail, for example, or analyze the work of a particular scholar. You should confirm a topic, outline, and preliminary bibliography with me by *March 24* (1-2 pages total). The papers are due (by email) on *May 10*.

## The Case Studies

Issues of West-Islamic relations, prominent since September 11, 2001, remain contested and ill-defined within the academy. They do not fit into our familiar ways of thinking about world politics in terms of states, markets, institutions, and interests. The collaborative exploration of particular case studies is a way to build new knowledge around three critical questions: What are the key issues in West-Islamic relations? What

are the approaches and arguments of the key political actors? What are the best ways forward? The case study materials that you will gather for a given week (dates and teams to be determined) will frame these questions for our class discussion.

The materials, crafted jointly in teams, will consist of two Word documents: a 10-15 page memorandum and a 25-50 page packet of supporting materials.

The memorandum should consist of three roughly equal parts: an analysis of the issues at stake, a presentation of the arguments of the key actors, and a consideration of lessons learned and ways forward. It should begin with a one-page executive summary and a one-page chronology of key events.

The supporting materials should map onto the three parts of the memorandum. They should include three kinds of excerpts: from news reports/analysis outlining the issues at stake, from statements by the key actors, and from analysts/commentators on lessons learned and ways forward. Each excerpt should include a hyperlink to full-text, where available. Provide a table of contents listing the excerpts and the pages they can be found.

The memorandum and supporting materials, *to be distributed one week before the class in question*, will frame three kinds of class discussion: an assessment of the underlying causes of the controversy and the issues at stake; an evaluation of the arguments of key actors (typically through a role-play); and a discussion of lessons learned and ways forward that allows for the incorporation of personal perspectives.

I will meet with each team two weeks before the materials are due to make suggestions about organization, sources, and content.

## PART I: HISTORICAL LEGACIES AND CONTEMPORARY FRAMES

### **January 9: Introduction. How to Think about West-Islamic Relations?**

### **January 14: Religion, Politics, and the Abrahamic Tradition**

F.E. Peters, *The Children of Abraham*, entire

Gregory Davis, "Islam 101" <http://www.jihadwatch.org/islam101/>

Key questions for discussion:

How do scripture and tradition link up with ethics and politics across traditions?

Whose account of Islam, Peters' or Davis', do you find more persuasive, and why?

Is the idea of Abrahamic Faiths a historical reality, a fantasy, or an ideal to be achieved?

**\*\*\* January 21. No Class. Martin Luther King Day**

## **January 28. Historical Legacies: From the Middle Ages to Modernity**

Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian Muslim Relations*, entire  
Bernard Lewis, "What Went Wrong?" *Atlantic Monthly*, 2002

Key questions for discussion:

In the history of Christian-Muslim relations, does conflict or cooperation predominate?  
Where do Goddard and Lewis differ in their approaches to history -- and conclusions?  
What are the political implications of endorsing one view of history over another?

## **February 4: Contemporary Frames: Clash or Commonality**

Richard Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*, entire  
Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs* (1993)

Class debate: Bulliet v. Huntington

Which frame better maps onto history?  
Which frame better maps onto political reality today?  
Which frame is a better orientation for a better future?

## **February 11: Mapping Muslim-West Dialogue**

*Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue*

Class discussion based on 250-500 word critiques of the report -- its strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement. The critiques are due as Word email attachments on Sunday, February 10 at 8:00pm. They will be circulated before class.

\*\*\* *February 18. No Class. Presidents Day*

## **PART II: CONTEMPORARY CASE STUDIES**

### **February 25. Terrorism: September 11, 2001 and its Aftermath**

The attacks of September 11 marked the emergence of Al Qaeda, a multinational terrorist organization with an extremist ideology, as a key actor in world politics. They also raised a series of questions that remain with us. To what extent is terrorism a religious and ideological issue? How have Western leaders framed the struggle with Al Qaeda and other Islamic extremists? How have Muslim leaders – and citizens – responded to September 11, the Madrid and London Bombings, and other attacks? And how can terrorism best be countered? Through military and police force, through shifts in foreign policy, and/or through long-range economic, social, and democratic development?

In addition to the memorandum and supporting materials, reading for this week includes:

Bruce Lawrence (ed). *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden* (London: Verso, 2006), introduction, 23-30, 213-232

“Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians, and Al Qaeda,”  
Worldpublicopinion.org, April 24, 2007

\*\*\* *March 3. No Class. Spring Break*

### **March 10. Media Power: The Mohammed Cartoons**

The publication of cartoons linking Mohammed to terrorism in Danish newspapers created a political firestorm in late 2005 and early 2006. Within Islam, graphic depictions of the Prophet are generally forbidden – not to mention negative caricatures. The republication of the cartoons in print media and their dissemination on the Web spurred peaceful demonstrations, some outbreaks of violence, and a heated debate about how to balance the right to free expression against respect for religious tradition. Key questions include: What caused the extended controversy – the cartoons or efforts to exploit them for political gain? Who was involved, and which arguments structured the debate? How and why did the controversy end and what are its implications for the future?

In addition to the memorandum and supporting materials, reading for this week includes:

BBC resource page: The Mohammed Cartoons Row:  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/4677976.stm>

“Muslims in Europe: A Cartoon Confrontation”  
[http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-terrorism/muslim\\_cartoons\\_3244.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-terrorism/muslim_cartoons_3244.jsp)

### **March 17. Interfaith Dialogue: Muslim-Catholic Relations**

At the Second Vatican Council in 1965, the Roman Catholic Church – the largest religious organization in the world – embraced interreligious dialogue, including an opening to Islam. In a September 2006 address in Regensburg, Pope Benedict XVI made a speech that included remarks critical of Mohammed. The address, which set off a firestorm of protest, marked the first time that issues of interreligious dialogue dominated international headlines. Key questions to consider include: What did the Pope say, and why was it so controversial? What were the charges leveled against him and how did he and his defenders respond? How did the controversy end, and what does it bode for the future of interreligious dialogue?

In addition to the memorandum and supporting materials, reading for this week includes:

Benedict XVI, “Faith, Reason, and the University. Memories and Reflections,”  
Speech at Regensburg, September 12, 2006

Leading Muslim Scholars: Open Letters to Benedict XVI, October 2006 and October 2007

\*\*\* **March 24. No Class. Easter Break. Paper outlines due**

### **March 31. Mapping Muslim-West Dialogue**

*Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of West-Islamic Dialogue*

Class discussion based on 250-500 word critiques of the online report resources, islamwest.org. Identify strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement. The critiques are due as Word email attachments on Sunday, March 30 at 8:00pm. They will be circulated before class.

### **April 7. Muslim Minorities: The Case of Tariq Ramadan**

The growth of Muslim minorities has changed the political landscape in Europe in particular. In the wake of September 11, 2001, governments have taken the offensive against extremists while seeking to engage moderate Muslim leaders. In this context, controversy has swirled around Tariq Ramadan, widely considered the most influential Muslim intellectual in Europe. Ramadan is on record for democracy and against terrorism, but has been denied a visa to enter the US. For some he is a fundamentalist, others charge links to extremists, but the reasons for his exclusion remain unclear. What are Ramadan's core ideas and why does he engender so much opposition? What are the core arguments of his defenders and detractors? What criteria should determine who is incorporated into West-Islamic dialogue – and who is excluded?

In addition to the memorandum and supporting materials, reading for this week includes:

Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), excerpts

Paul Berman, "Whose Afraid of Tariq Ramadan?," *The New Republic*, June 4, 2007

### **April 14. Religious Freedom: The Case of Abdul Rahman**

In the context of globalization, marked by rapid flows of ideas and people, questions of religious freedom have gained increasing global salience. The right to have and adopt a religion of one's choice is a widely accepted international norm, even as the right to proselytize and convert others is contested. In this context, efforts to uphold Islam's traditional opposition to apostasy are a source of international tension. This was most notable in the case of an Afghan convert to Christianity, Abdul Rahman, who was threatened with the death penalty in 2006. What were the conflicting norms at stake in the Rahman case? What were the main arguments deployed for and against Rahman's right

to convert? What does the outcome of the case – emigration under domestic international pressure – suggest about the future role of religious freedom in West-Islamic relations?

In addition to the memorandum and supporting materials, reading for this week include

Washingtonpost.com's "On Faith" forum, "Muslims Speak Out"

<http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/projects/muslimsspeakout/index.html>

Tom Farr, *World of Faith and Freedom* (manuscript), excerpts

### **April 21. Middle East Peace: The Status of Jerusalem**

Perhaps the most intractable issue blocking Middle East peace is the status of Jerusalem. It is, like many other dimensions of the conflict, territorial, strategic, and political. But it also has an irreducible religious dimension. Jerusalem is a sacred city for Islam, as well as for Judaism and Christianity. The question of the future of the city and its most holy site, the Temple Mount, was one of the stumbling blocks at Camp David in 2000, and remains so today. Key questions are: To what extent is the status of Jerusalem a religious, as opposed to a political or strategic issue? How do key protagonists, particularly Israelis and Palestinians, view the conflict? And what are the future prospects for resolving it peacefully?

In addition to the memorandum and supporting materials, reading for this week include

Bernard Wasserstein, *Divided Jerusalem: The Struggle for the Holy City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 1-13, 317-344

Cecilia Albin, "Explaining Conflict Transformation: How Jerusalem Became Negotiable," *Cambridge Journal of International Relations* (October 2005)

### **CONCLUSION**

### **April 28. The Future of West-Islamic Relations**

\*\*\* *May 10. Term Paper due by email*