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INSIDE

Hong Kong and
Beyond.....page 2

Just Another Talkshop or a
Real Opportunity for Action
.....page 4

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Radicalisation of Islamic Societies Worldwide

and its impact on negative Western perceptions of Islam

VICTORY by the Islamic militant group, Hamas in the Palestinian parliamentary elections (2006); the bombings in London's underground railway system (2005); clashes between Islamic militants and security forces in Riyadh (2005); favourable election results for Muslim Brotherhood independent candidates in Egypt's 2005 elections; the assassination of Theo van Gogh (2004); the Madrid bombings (2004) killing over 200 people, the Moscow theatre attack (2002); and the rise of militant Islamic groups across Muslim societies in predominantly secular countries such as Nigeria, France, UK, Indonesia and Malaysia all point to a development that has been well-documented. Islamic radicalism is on the rise among younger generation Muslims, not only within disadvantaged communities, but within the well-off and educated middle-class.

The infamous terrorist attacks of 11 September on the US did not mark the beginning of a Western response to Islamic militancy, but they initiated a global reaction to what many in the West saw as an attack on western values and secularism. However, the US-led coalition to drive out the Taliban from power in Afghanistan; and the toppling of a hostile regime in Iraq; and the sweeping arrests of suspected al-Qaeda members following the fallout of the attacks in Southeast Asia, Western Europe, North America, the Middle East and North Africa as well as in East Africa did not wipe out the threat of Islamic fundamentalism.

Political leaders in both the West and the Middle East have failed to examine the underlining reasons that have helped to contribute to the radicalisation of Muslim societies in both predominantly Islamic and secular Western states. Equally important, a lack of effort and coordination by these governments to deal effectively with the root of the problems fuelling Islamic

militancy in these societies have led to the increasing rate of indoctrination of Muslim youths in mosques, Islamic centres and schools. This has helped form the basis for the continued misunderstanding and a lack of sensitivity between Western secular and Islamic traditional principles.

This growing rift was recently highlighted following the publishing of the controversial editorial cartoons by Danish conservative daily newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005. The decision by Flemming Rose, the cultural editor of *Jyllands-Posten* to publish a dozen cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad as a terrorist carrying a bomb, in another portraying him wielding a cutlass, while another had him state that there is no more room in paradise for suicide-bombers, stem from the difficulty experienced by Danish writer Kåre Bluitgen in finding artists to illustrate his children's book about the Prophet because of fear of reprisals by Islamic militants. Since then a string of newspapers in various European states, including Spain, France, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands and in Scandinavia, have also reprinted some of the cartoons in the name of freedom of speech.

The response by Muslims around the world was overwhelmingly critical. Islamic traditions forbid any depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in any negative light. The Quran explicitly condemns idolatry, although it does not directly prohibit pictorial arts. Nevertheless, there are references in certain hadiths that explicitly condemn pictorial arts and any depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in any fashion. It was no surprise that these cartoons unleashed a storm of anger and retaliatory action.

A dozen Islamic countries called on the Danish government to take legal action against *Jyllands-Posten* in addition to submitting a formal apology

Radicalisation (continued)

to Muslims. But the Danes remained steadfast in their support of the independence of the media and the importance of free speech and expression. The government agreed to apologise only if Muslims were offended, while refusing to apologise for the publication of the cartoons.

The initial publication of the cartoons by *Jyllands-Posten* and the Danish government's failure to succumb to the pressures and demands by Islamic governments highlight two important points.

Firstly, they reflect the increasing frustration by growing segments of the population in the West with the intolerance of militant Islam and the dangers it poses to their freedom and democracy. The violent string of attacks by Islamic militants, especially since the 11 September attacks have negatively and erroneously portrayed Islam as a religion of violence with acts committed by disenfranchised and increasingly frustrated youth who have yet to assimilate themselves in Western societies, as well as frustrated Muslims in the Middle East.

The West as well as secular Middle Eastern governments fear the growing radicalisation of Muslim communities and societies. In traditionally secular states such as Lebanon, Syria, Algeria and Egypt, religion is making a very strong comeback because people feel their governments' socialist and pan-Arab ideologies have failed over the past four decades to bring about improved living conditions, economic development and political openness and because they feel that local and national governments are not responsive to their social needs. This new radicalisation is slowly creeping into schools and universities. However, government officials have argued that the increasing radicalisation reflected in a growing number of women adopting full Islamic cover and men wearing long beards is largely due to the influence of Wahhabism and Salafism from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait where a number of their citizens work.

In Western Europe, second-generation Middle Easterners have been unwilling or have found integration difficult. A large number are increasingly frustrated with high unemployment, slow or

poor service delivery and continual discrimination. Neighbourhoods housing large Muslim populations in France, UK, Spain, Italy and Germany are described by European security forces as hotbeds for Islamic militancy. Radical mullahs and sheiks preach hatred and violence to younger generation Muslims in their sermons. Recently, Italy and France took steps to deport radical sheiks to their countries of origin.

Secondly, the publication of the cartoons by *Jyllands-Posten* demonstrates a lack of sensitivity and a disregard for Islamic beliefs in the West. Western secular societies are certainly on a path of increasing friction with Islamic traditional religious beliefs that regard religion as the primary pillar of human existence and their way of life. The critical condemnation by Muslims around the world also reflects their dissatisfaction and disdain of Western liberal and secular values where religion plays a minor or even a non-existent role in society.

In order to stem the tide of Islamic militancy in their respective regions, policy-makers in both the Middle East and the West need to tackle the underlying issues that give rise to the radicalisation in traditionally secular Muslim societies and communities. The revival of Islam among Muslim populations in the past two decades is often wrongly seen as a backlash against westernisation *per se*. Rather, it is rooted in some of its immediate consequences.

Western governments have failed to understand the grievances that are shared by their Muslim communities in their home countries. From the first Gulf War (1990-91) to Somalia (1993), Bosnia-Herzegovina (1993-96), Chechnya (1999) and the second Palestinian Intifada (from 2000 onwards), Muslims have faced the negative consequences of Western economic and political decisions. The immediate outcry by Muslims around the world about the publishing of the Danish cartoons highlights the deep grievances of Muslims with Western policies, as well as the inability and incapability of Middle Eastern governments to protect the rights and address the grievances of their citizens. The widening rift between secular Western societies and Islamic militancy threatens to spread.

Hong Kong and Beyond

THE Doha Development Round of multilateral trade negotiations has been scheduled for completion by the end of 2006. Following the outcome of the 6th World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial meeting in Hong Kong, it seems unlikely this deadline will be met.

Most postmortems agree that Hong Kong was a failure, but not in a Cancun sense. The biggest bottleneck prior to the Ministerial concerned the negotiations over agricultural market access. The European Union (EU) was and remains the key player in this regard, being by far the most defensive and inflexible on these issues. Moreover, the EU had repeatedly stressed and continues to argue that the Doha Round is about more than just agriculture—for the EU to be able to offer more flexibility, others had to offer more in non-agricultural market access (NAMA) and services.

The following compromises, amongst others, were negotiated at Hong Kong. First, the EU promised the elimination of agricultural export subsidies by 2013. However, this 'concession' already formed part of the EU's 2003 reforms of its Common Agricultural Policy. Second, the EU, US and Japan agreed to effective cuts in trade-distorting domestic subsidies, but sceptics argued that these will not significantly reduce real levels of support. Thirdly, a mix of developed and developing countries, subject to certain conditions, offered duty- and quota-free access to 97% of least developed country (LDC) exports. The noted problem here is that because LDC exports are heavily concentrated in a small range of commodities, the remaining 3% may yet prove significant.

NAMA negotiations saw no progress. A group of developing countries (the so-called NAMA-11, including South Africa) refused to move until significant breakthroughs in agriculture were forthcoming. On services, developed countries, the EU in

Hong Kong & Beyond (continued)

particular, asked of other members more and better offers on the opening of their services sectors to foreign providers. These have in general not been forthcoming.

South Africa, like many developing countries, went to Hong Kong focused on agriculture and development. Dr Rob Davies, one of South Africa's two deputy ministers of trade and industry, had argued prior to the Ministerial that the multilateral trading system must be a more effective vehicle for economic development in poor countries, and that Hong Kong should be about reclaiming the spirit of development envisaged in the 2001 Doha Declaration.¹ The head of South Africa's delegation, Faizel Ismail, shared these sentiments and argued that the offers made by the developed countries on agriculture are disproportionately small in comparison to the demands they are making in NAMA and services.²

Despite these problems, WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy remains optimistic that the Doha Round will deliver a developmental outcome and will be completed by the end of 2006. During his visit to the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) in February 2006, he said Hong Kong, on balance, represents progress.³ He said development should not

be viewed in isolation, but as a component in each of the areas of negotiation.

Similarly, he argued that 'Aid for Trade' is not a development cure-all, but should be viewed as a set of complementary measures aimed at enabling poorer countries to participate more effectively in the global trading system. On South Africa, Lamy acknowledged the country's vital role in the negotiations, especially as regards the need to continue to find compromises amongst the often disparate positions held by the various coalitions and country groupings.

In a same-day visit to SAIIA, EU trade commissioner Peter Mandelson said the EU had done enough in Hong Kong and it was up to other members to make Doha a success. He criticised South Africa, an increasingly influential player, for not putting forth an offer in the services negotiations.

According to Mandelson, the real development gains lie with liberalising trade in industrial products, particularly amongst developing countries themselves. South-South trade comprises 40% of developing countries' exports. Moreover, 70% of trade duties paid by developing country exporters are to other developing country governments. For Mandelson, liberalising South-South trade is the

fundamental piece of the trade-development puzzle. But cynics say this provides a convenient smokescreen behind which the EU continues to shelter its massive domestic subsidies and high tariffs on developing country agricultural exports.

Where to from here? The deadlines set in Hong Kong for completion of the Round are extremely tight, and divisions remain large. As has always been the case, much will depend on whether the EU and the US can find sufficient common ground. But it is certain that, unlike in earlier trade rounds, developing countries will have a significant part to play. South Africa, a key member of the now well-established Group of Twenty (G-20) and the newer NAMA-11, will remain pivotal to Doha's success.

Endnotes

¹ INSAT 2005, No. 3, P. 8

² INSAT 2005, No. 3, P. 14

³ Lamy P 2006, 'Concluding the WTO's Doha Round: The post-Hong Kong Roadmap', http://saiia.org/za/images/upload/Lamy%20Statement_Feb%202006.pdf

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Just Another Talkshop or a Real Opportunity for Action?

IN NOVEMBER 2005, more than 40 Ethiopians died and many more were wounded after Prime Minister Meles Zenawi sanctioned the use of arms to suppress public protests disputing the May election results. His regime subsequently detained over 130 opposition leaders, journalists and NGO workers. Scarcely the hallmarks of a progressive leader, most people would agree. Yet Meles arrived, together with Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and South Korea's Lee Hae-Chan to join South Africa's Thabo Mbeki and various western heads of state at the optimistically-named *Progressive Governance Summit* held in South

Africa during February 2006.

This annual by-invitation-only gathering of leaders, with a social or centre-left world-view to discuss global strategies for progressive politics, was initiated in April 1999 when former American President Bill Clinton convened a round-table discussion with his British, German, Italian and Dutch counterparts; and the first high-level summit occurred in Berlin the following year. Absent from this year's guest list were German Chancellor Angela Merkel, recently-elected Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and US President George W Bush (who are from the conservative end of

the political spectrum), though their predecessors all remain involved with the network. At the other end of the political spectrum, neither Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez nor Bolivia's Evo Morales received an invitation.

Essop Pahad, Minister in the South African Presidency, called the event an opportunity for frank discussion and even self-criticism in a relaxed atmosphere without normal protocol constraints. Perhaps the network has a laudable aim, but its extremely broad definition of 'progressive' means that participants are unlikely to find consensus on policy issues except at very shallow levels. For

Just Another talkshop (continued)

example, what can New Zealand's Prime Minister Helen Clark, known for pursuing a determinedly independent foreign policy, have in common with Tony Blair, whose foreign policy, some would argue, has more in common with the conservative Bush administration than with some of the other leaders attending the summit?

The February meeting included discussions on elections, particularly challenges from the new right and traditional left, as well as a discourse on what progressives can do to ensure the success of global trade negotiations. The presence of African Development Bank President Donald Kaberuka, European Union (EU) Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson and WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy underscored the focus on trade, with President Lula emphasising the need for 'a special session to follow on Hong Kong in order to outline steps to tear down trade barriers and end farm subsidies'.

The tight lid kept on the content and context of deliberations limits the scope for analysis, but with both Lamy and Mandelson having spoken at the South African Institute of International Affairs prior to the closed session, it is possible to deduce the direction that the trade talks might have taken.

Mandelson stressed the importance of a more active role by South Africa in Europe's Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in order to ensure economic coherence both within the region and between the region and the EU. His call for 'a big agenda to expand our trade relationship' suggests that this was a key theme of the summit. Lamy emphasised the need for concessions on all sides: 'The EU will have to move on agricultural market access...the US will also have to move further on domestic subsidies in agriculture...(and) the big developing countries...have to move on market access for industrial products and services,' he declared. Both men seemed amenable to the summit's aims of crafting a politically progressive stand on issues and making the

trade issue a political issue, as outlined by Mojanku Gumbi in the South African presidency.

The summit reportedly shared ideas for effective energy use and solutions to environmental crises. At a recent meeting of prominent New Zealand businesspeople, Clark indicated a commitment to reducing New Zealand's oil consumption and emission of greenhouse gases. Among examples of shared good practice from the summit, she cited both Sweden's appointment of 'a commission to advise on how to eliminate oil from the Swedish economy in twenty years' and Brazil's 'plans for biofuel production, and the production of cars which can run on three fuels'.¹

While the agenda of the Progressive Governance Summit also highlighted development in Africa and policy challenges for the 21st century, there were few tangible outcomes in this regard. Aside from generic statements by Lula and Blair pledging support for Africa, the summit appears to have generated much talk but little real action. To reach convergence in the form of a 'progressive stand' on issues as wide-ranging and complex as those outlined in the agenda cannot be easy. Geographic distance alone renders common ground hard to reach, leaving aside differences in strategic, political or economic contexts. For example, in the post 9/11 security context, some analysts see the prevailing neoconservative nexus as a major threat to progressive politics and view Blair's support as a betrayal of the Clintonsque 'third way'. It is such nuances in *realpolitik* that prevent consensus at summits of ostensibly like-minded leaders.

But the summit does allow for face-to-face encounters between heads of state, which builds mutual confidence, trust and respect that are significant when dealing with international issues. In this regard, the discussions between Blair and Mbeki have cemented a tougher stance by both Downing Street and Pretoria on Zimbabwe, says the *Zimbabwe Independent*. The newspaper claims that Mbeki told Blair he had resolved to steer clear of Zimbabwe and 'let the situation sort itself out'.² 'This hardening of attitudes against Harare's

autocrats augurs ill for those in Addis too. Indeed, the frosty climate apparent between the British and Ethiopian prime ministers during press appearances at the summit underscored their divergence on issues of human rights and good governance.

The mutual (and ultimately ineffectual) disdain observed between Meles and Blair may compound the notion that the Progressive Governance Summit was little more than a talk-shop. Matt Browne, director of Policy Network, which acts as the summit's secretariat, emphasises that the event is 'not about coming up with courses of action but more about offering a chance for leaders to share their experience of leading with like-minded and sympathetic people'.³ On the other hand, if such sharing can lead to progress, however minimal, on stalled trade talks and environmental problems, both of which have global repercussions, then perhaps these summits have a role to play, after all.

Future events could gain from greater emphasis on issue-based common policy formulation and frameworks for action. These would serve to temper domestic policy choices thereafter. Such an outcome could develop into a subtle 'peer review' among progressive leaders that would, at the very least, cause them to think twice before undertaking courses of action that their 'progressive' peers would consider as undemocratic or counter-progressive.

Endnotes

¹ Clark H, Speech at EMA Auckland CEO's Network Breakfast, 28 February 2006, New Zealand Government.

² *Zimbabwe Independent*, 'Mugabe advisors push for Blair talks', 24 February 2006, [www.theindependent.co.zw]

³ *Business Day*, 'Lonely as a leader, well join the club', 10 February 2006, [www.businessday.co.za]