

ESF Exploratory Workshop on
**Demystifying the Caliphate: advocates,
opponents and implications for Europe**

London (UK), November 12-13, 2010

Convened by:
Professor Madawi Al-Rasheed
Co-convened by:
Dr Carool Kersten and Dr Marat Shterin

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

1. Executive summary

The ESF Exploratory Workshop 'Demystifying the Caliphate: advocates, opponents and implications for Europe' took place at the Council Room of King's College London, Strand Campus, United Kingdom, on November 12-13, 2010. Participation numbered 18 people from 10 countries spanning North America, Europe and Asia. Regular coffee and lunch breaks, as well as three opportunities to dine out in the evenings, encouraged a friendly atmosphere in which participants benefitted from the opportunity to network and develop ideas with academics from a range of disciplines, outlooks and parts of the world. The variety of perspectives represented at the workshop, including those of insider activists, encouraged stimulating exchanges, while participants were mindful to retain neither an apologist nor an alarmist approach to a topic that has provoked heated and polarised debate throughout the world.

There were four panels, grouped according to historical period / region, although the order of papers had to be slightly revised due to practical constraints. The panels were entitled 'Debates on the Caliphate in the Twentieth century', 'Contemporary Controversies in the Middle East and North Africa', 'Contemporary Controversies in Asia' and 'The Caliphate and European Muslims'.

The workshop aimed to investigate the controversial revival of the caliphate among Muslims in Europe and across the Muslim world and thereby compensate for the lack of comparative modern scholarship that encompasses both historical and contemporary / social scientific perspectives, as well as both the Muslim and non-Muslim world. 'Demystifying the Caliphate' was conceived as a result of discussions between the three convenors – specialists in the Middle East, South-East Asia and Europe / Russia respectively – who were inspired by the fact that all three had encountered the concept of the caliphate in their work, regardless of the region on which they focused. Professor Madawi Al-Rasheed, introducing the workshop, explained that the concept has crossed borders and boundaries and today triggers fervent opinions from all quarters, despite its lack of any clear definition among discussants.

The workshop objectives were eight-fold. First, to identify the historical conditions of late modernity, including new forms of media and the role of mass education and literacy, that have helped to fan pro-caliphate ideologies across the globe. Second, to identify competing claims to and visions of the caliphate among contemporary Muslims. Third, to identify the sociological conditions that highlight the caliphate among contemporary Muslims. Fourth, to explore the differences in the political projects of those who call for the revival of the caliphate. Fifth, to highlight the role of European diaspora Muslims in these discourses. Sixth, to identify research that is centred in the transnational realm to highlight links between diaspora and the 'homeland'. Seventh, to explore the roots and content of calls for the re-establishment of the caliphate – are they mere fantasies or outbursts of despair, or are they motivated by sincere intentions to mobilise? Eighth, to examine Western discourses that have developed in response to Muslims' calls for the resurrection of the caliphate.

Several conclusions were drawn at the workshop. In particular, the presentations illuminated the wide range of views that contemporary Muslims hold about the revival of the caliphate, debunking the myth that this is a universal ideal for all Muslims. Some see the caliphate as a glorious political institution that must be resurrected; others merely hold a nostalgic view of the caliphate as an historical institution, associating it with an imagined community and former glory. Yet others maintain a nostalgic view of earlier pious caliphates while denouncing later ones as blasphemous, while others are secularist in outlook, opposing the

Ottoman caliphate or even all caliphates. Finally, there are still more Muslims with ambiguous positions, particularly those who aspire to the caliphate yet do not actively or openly mobilise in pursuit of this goal.

The workshop also highlighted the fact that the vocabulary, content and support of both historical and contemporary calls for the resurrection of the caliphate are extremely varied and highly context-driven. The aspirations of pro-caliphate thinkers and movements range from strongly authoritarian conceptions of the institution to those that merely stress sovereignty and the need for a figurehead. The strategy for the re-establishment of the caliphate, the concentration on some grievances over others and whether such rhetoric has any resonance at all can also be heavily tied to local circumstances. In addition, several papers demonstrated how local / nationalist concerns in some Muslim countries have competed with pan-Islamic appeals to a universal Muslim *umma*.

'Demystifying the Caliphate' also shed light on the sociological conditions that can enhance the message of pro-caliphate movements today. Disillusionment as a result of political, economic and social grievances in particular was highlighted, as well as the importance of mass media in publicising discourses on the caliphate.

2. Scientific content of the event

The 1924 abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate, though welcomed in some quarters, provoked lingering sentiments of lost glory, righteousness and esteem among many Muslims that have been channelled in different ways up to the present day. Indeed, this emotional sense of loss has been so powerful that it has often formed the root of Islamist identities, said Dr Mona Hassan, who analysed the divergent approaches of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizb al-Tahrir, and al-Qaeda to this issue. At the heart of such groups' rhetoric is a nostalgic view of the caliphate as a lost 'golden age' and a perception of its destruction as responsible for unleashing various post-colonial problems upon Muslim societies.

Reza Pankhurst also gave several prominent examples of the different ways in which Muslim thinkers have idealised the caliphate over the last 100 years. While Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, prioritised reform of the individual as a pre-condition for establishing the caliphate, Hizb al-Tahrir aimed to mobilise immediately, reasoning that grassroots reformation could not occur under an un-Islamic system. Later, al-Qaeda's discourse evolved after 9/11 from a focus on dissent towards the Saudi regime to one on the universality of the caliphate as a rallying point for all Muslims.

Meanwhile, Dr Ursula Gunther demonstrated how even diaspora European Muslims have actively mobilised in pursuit of the caliphate in recent years through her study of two 'caliphs' and one 'counter-caliph', who emerged from Turkish migrant movements in Germany. A lack of territory did not deter the 'caliphs' from expounding their ideas about the aims and duties of the caliph, how such a state should be run and the implementation of *shari'a*.

There was some discussion on whether such aspirations are realistic or represent mere utopian visions. One participant argued that the Muslim Brotherhood is 'part of a long tradition of Sunni realism – their ideas are academically interesting, but they're political dead ends'. This prompted another to respond that such visions represent detailed political projects that cannot be easily dismissed. However, others regarded the programmes of

groups such as Hizb al-Tahrir as vague and ambiguous – even deliberately so, according to one participant, who argued that such imprecision actually broadens the ideology's appeal.

Another participant likened the utopianism of pro-caliphate rhetoric to that of messianism, which has enjoyed a revival in Shi'ism, supported by President Ahmadinejad's claim that he has 'direct' communication with the *mahdi*. This provoked heated debate, and another participant called for broader comparative perspectives with other movements, such as millenarianism, albeit with caution.

Meanwhile, another participant said that, while the realism and specifics of political projects differ, all Muslims aspire to the caliphate because at its core are the ideals of political unity and a fair distribution of wealth. In response, one participant pointed out that empirical evidence suggests otherwise. Another said: 'We must resist the urge to see the caliphate everywhere where there is a crisis among Muslims, even where it is not being invoked.' Indeed, as several presentations demonstrated, many Muslims are indifferent or even hostile towards the revival of the caliphate.

Dr Nuri Tinaz, who conducted a survey of 280 Faculty of Divinity students at two major universities in Turkey between October 11 and 22, 2010, concluded that the caliphate is not currently on the agenda of Muslims in Turkey, who are more interested in interpreting Islam for a democratic context. Just 49 said that the caliphate was 'very important', and about half said that, although it is important, it is not valid today. The majority said that the ideal government is a parliamentary democracy.

Meanwhile, Dr Sara Silvestri, who undertook qualitative research on Muslim women in Europe, gained the impression that most ordinary Muslims did not even know the meaning of the caliphate and had never heard of Mustafa Cerić, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia, around whom some European Muslim organisations have attempted to unite. For Dr Silvestri, this underlined the need – often overlooked in scholarship – to understand 'everyday religion', which can represent a considerable contrast to that of intellectuals and organisations.

Moreover, Wahhabis who follow the tradition of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) have seldom called for the revival of the caliphate, according to Professor Madawi Al-Rasheed. More preoccupied by purity than unity, Wahhabis have charged the Ottoman Caliphate with encouraging blasphemy and borrowing Western legal concepts, among other offences, and this thinking has permeated the writings of even some jihadi-Wahhabis, such as Nasir al-Fahd. Yet there is also a nationalist element to such critiques from Arabs weary of neo-Ottoman influence, demonstrating an interesting tension between global 'ummic' identities and narrow local ones.

Such conflicts between the idea of pan-Islamic unity and nationalist concerns were also apparent during the first few decades of the 20th century in British India. Dr Jan-Peter Hartung explored how these tensions, borne of the colonial context, were reflected in three Muslim thinkers' different conceptions of the caliphate, ranging from either a political institution, which even non-Muslims can play a role in re-establishing, to an expression of firm Islamic beliefs. Similarly, the three intellectuals differed on whether the caliphate should be seen as an abstract theological notion or an historical institution in the succession of Muhammad.

Similar tensions are also apparent elsewhere. Dr Khaled Hroub explained how in Palestine, the grim daily reality of the Israeli occupation has enhanced the reception of revolutionary

Islamist rhetoric, presenting the pan-Islamist Hizb al-Tahrir with a dilemma: should it maintain its ambiguous position on the use of violence or concede to nationalist concerns?

Several presentations highlighted the importance of historical and political context in shaping the content, vocabulary and resonance of calls for the revival of the caliphate across different parts of the world over the past century. Professor Muhammad Qasim Zaman explained how early discourses surrounding the establishment of Pakistan were influenced, in part, by ideas relating to the caliphate at a time when establishing new structures of religio-political authority, legal reform and social justice were high on the agenda. In these circumstances, pro-caliphate rhetoric was more focused on general calls for an Islamic state ruled by *shari'a* than on a narrow conception of the caliphate.

In Iraq, recent sectarian conflict has led the Shia community, who declared loyalty to the Ottoman Caliph in 1920 (though this was primarily a matter of political expedience), temporarily to surrender the concept of the caliphate to the Sunnis. According to Dr Loulouwa Al-Rachid, Iraqi Shias currently associate the concept with oppression from their sectarian rivals.

In Indonesia, the rush of pan-Islamist sentiment fuelled by the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate seemed to diminish in the late 1920s and 30s as it became absorbed into the nationalist agendas of Indonesian Muslims more preoccupied by the fate of their own country than with Turkey or the Hejaz. By analysing the Dutch East Indies press from the 1920s to the 1940s, plus Islamic literature produced at the time, Dr Chiara Formichi demonstrated how references to Turkey dramatically decreased following the surge of pan-Islamist opinion in the wake of the 1924 abolition and became focused on the empowerment of women and the modernisation of Turkey as 'Kemalism' gathered momentum among secular nationalist movements.

Later, the prominent Indonesian Muslim intellectual Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005) demonstrated another way of combining a pro-caliphate ideology with secularisation. Dr Carool Kersten explained how Madjid, having distinguished between this-worldly and other-worldly aspects of Islam, reinterpreted the caliphate as an abstraction reflecting the vicegerency of humankind on earth. His separation of the two domains allowed him to argue for secularisation as an acceptable means of strengthening the mandate from God to develop the world, a view reflected in his slogan 'Islam Yes! Islamic Party No!'.

Other presentations focused on the sociological conditions that highlight the caliphate among contemporary Muslims in Indonesia, Central Asia and the Northern Caucasus. Dr Akhmet Yarlykapov and Dr Marat Shterin identified the crucial 'push' and 'pull' factors that have influenced post-Soviet young Muslims' embracement of the concept of the caliphate in the Northern Caucasus. Through interviews, they found that a widespread disrespect of state structures due to pervasive corruption has rendered attractive the caliphate and *shari'a* law as they represent, for some young Muslims, a just system in which such practices would be condemned. They also discovered that as Russian, regional and ethnic identities lose their significance in the globalised age, these youth have been drawn to alternative sources of authority.

In Central Asia, post-Soviet structural problems and an ideological and 'spiritual' vacuum have created a context in which Hizb al-Tahrir has been able to grow, according to Dr Emmanuel Karagiannis, who conducted interviews with members. Hizb al-Tahrir has effectively promoted its message that it can solve such socioeconomic and political problems

both here and in Indonesia, where, as Claudia Nef-Saluz explained, it has become one of the most visible organisations on university campuses. Ms Nef-Saluz, who undertook fieldwork among activists in the 2000s, said that Hizb al-Tahrir's conception of the caliphate also allows activists to combine their university knowledge with their Islamic beliefs – medical student activists, for example, use their knowledge to criticise the social welfare system while demonstrating why the caliphate is the answer.

There was some discussion about the ways in which Hizb al-Tahrir and similar movements have engaged with modernity by emphasising and empowering the individual, thereby gaining recruits. One participant said that Salafis, for example, are known for their cross-cultural marriages. In contrast to more traditional Islamic trends, Salafism allows its adherents to marry without the approval of parents or guardians. 'We forget about these very important modern conditions when we focus on the ideals of the utopian caliphate,' she said.

The presentations on Hizb al-Tahrir also emphasised the role of mass media in the late modern age in publicising their ideology. Dr Nef-Saluz explained how mobile phones and other technology have created new opportunities for like-minded people to share ideas across time and space. Dr Karagiannis pointed out that, despite being banned, Hizb al-Tahrir in Central Asia is particularly adept at resource mobilisation, making effective use of informal networks of friends and families, as well as mosques, membership fees and donations.

Meanwhile, Professor Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen's paper highlighted the importance of satellite television, the accessibility and popularity of which may well outstrip those of the works of theologians and ideologues. Focusing on four recent Arab television dramas of the past 20 years, Prof Skovgaard-Petersen showed how, in countries where the rhetoric of both authoritarian rulers and Islamists is powerful, television dramas have both criticised and mythologised the caliphate, depicting the might of the state, the corruption of power and the piety of the individual caliph.

3. Assessment of the results, contribution to the future direction of the field, outcome

Several new research objectives were identified as a result of the workshop:

- Further research into the person of the caliph, rather than focusing on the caliphate as a system or institution, would be valuable.
- Possible parallels between pro-caliphate and messianic / millenarian groups from other religious traditions might prove a fruitful area of research.
- More coverage of non-Muslim discourses on the caliphate would be useful.
- Research into the turnover rates of groups such as Hizb al-Tahrir is needed – do adherents eventually reject its ideology?
- A chapter on the history of the caliphate in the forthcoming volume (see below) in order to set the context for these movements would be welcome.
- Empirical, comparative studies examining the impact of discourses on the caliphate are needed, but require extensive funding.

As a follow-up to the workshop, the convenors have secured a contract with Hurst in partnership with Columbia University Press to publish the papers as an edited volume. In addition, it was suggested that a survey of Islamic political theory on the caliphate might be worth undertaking in the volume or elsewhere. It was also suggested that someone could set up a research programme to bring together two or three institutions to create a proposal for

further research into the areas we did not cover, though there are no immediate plans to take this forward. Failing that, some sort of research network would be welcome.

4. Final programme

Friday 12 November 2010

Council Room, King's Building, Strand Campus

08:30 am	Registration
09.00-09.20	Welcome by Convenor, Prof Madawi Al-Rasheed (KCL)
09.20-09.40	Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF), Dilek Barlas (ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities – SCH / ESF Standing Committee for Social Sciences - SCSS)
09.40-13:00	Debates on the Caliphate in the Twentieth century Chair: Madawi Al-Rasheed (KCL)
09.40-10.10	<i>South Asian Islam and the Idea of the Caliphate,</i> Qasim Zaman (Princeton)
10.25-11.30	Coffee
11.30-12.00	<i>After Cordoba: constructing and reconstructing Muslim's missing Caliphate,</i> Sara Silverstri (City University London)
12.00-12.30	<i>Contemporary disputes over the nature and legitimacy of the Caliphate theory,</i> Reza Pankhurst (LSE)
13.00-14.30	Lunch
14.30-18.00	Afternoon Session: Contemporary Controversies in the Middle East and North Africa Chair: Madawi Al-Rasheed
14.30-15.00	<i>The Wahhabis and the Ottoman Caliphate: the Persistence of Historical Antagonism,</i> Madawi Al-Rasheed (KCL)
15.00-15.30	<i>Revival of Claims to the Caliphate in Iraq after the Occupation,</i> Loulouwa Al-Rachid (International Crisis Group, Paris)
15.30-16.00	Coffee
16.00-16.30	The Caliphate on the Screen, Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen (Copenhagen)
16.30-17:00	<i>Emotional Rhetoric among Islamists about Caliphal Utopia,</i> Mona Hassan (Duke)
17.00-18:00	Discussion
19.30	Dinner

Saturday 13 November 2010
Council Room, King's Building, Strand Campus

- 09.00-13:00** **Morning Session: Contemporary Controversies in Asia**
Chair: Carool Kersten (KCL)
- 09.00-09.30** *Who Speaks of What Caliphate? The Indian Khilafat Movement and its Aftermath*, **Jan-Peter Hartung** (SOAS)
- 09.30-10.00** *Khilafa as human vicegerency: Piety and Politics in the Thought of Nurcholish Madjid*, **Carool Kersten** (KCL)
- 10.00-10.30** *Promoting the Caliphate on Campus: Dakwah strategies of Hizb-ut-Tahrir student activists in Indonesia*, **Caudia Nef-Saluz** (Institute of Social Anthropology Zurich)
- 10.30-11.30** Coffee
- 11.30-12.00** *The Caliphate in Colonial Indonesia*,
Chiara Formichi (Singapore)
- 12.00-12.30** *Political Islam in Central Asia: on the trail of Hizb ut-Tahrir*,
Emmanuel Karagiannis (University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki)
- 13.00-14.00** Lunch
- 14.00-17.00** **Afternoon Session: The Caliphate and European Muslims**
Chair: Marat Shterin (KCL)
- 14.00-14.30** *Muslims' Perceptions of and Attitudes Towards the Institution of the Caliphate in Modern Turkey*, **Nuri Tinaz** (Centre for Islamic Studies, Istanbul)
- 14:30-15:00** *Imagining the Caliphate in Contemporary Russia: Muslim's beliefs and societal fears*, **Marat Shterin** (KCL) and **Akhmet Yarlykapov** (Russian Academy of Science)
- 15.00-16.00** Coffee
- 16.00-16.30** *Temporary resurrection of the Caliphate in Germany? Insights into the phenomenon of a radical sectarian movement among Turkish working migrants*, **Ursula Gunther**
- 16.30-17.00** *The Palestinan Hizb-al-Tahrir: Tensions between universal rhetoric and the reality of Israeli occupation*, **Khaled Hroub** (Cambridge Arab Media Project)
- 17.00-18.30** Discussion on Follow-up
Activities/Networking/Collaboration/Publication
- 19:30** Dinner

5. Final list of participants

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6. Statistical information on participants

Countries of origin:

United Kingdom	7
US	2
Turkey	2
Greece	1
Singapore	1
France	1
Denmark	1
Switzerland	1
Russia	1
Germany	1

Participation by gender:

Female	8
Male	10

Participation by age:

Age range: 30-55