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December 4, 2008: The Secularization of Islam

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Title: The Secularization of Islam

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12/4/2008—We may look back at the terrorist attacks in Mumbai as the beginning of the secularization of Islam. That, at least, is how the Wars of Religion in Europe during the latter half of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century affected religious life there. Those wars between Catholics and Protestants not only exhausted Europe, they played a part in delegitimizing Christianity among European elites. It was felt by many that any institution that could be responsible for such carnage must be bad. In similar fashion, if Islamic leadership is unable to decouple Islam from fanatical violence, undoubtedly Islam will lose its educated youth. I do not mean to criticize Islam on these matters. That is not really for an outsider to do. But terrorism is never going to be a choice for the overwhelming majority of believers. If religion and violence are seen as partners, people will eventually turn away from religion. I doubt that there is anything that Muslim leaders can actually do to isolate Islam's violent minority. Monotheism of all kinds seems to have this potential for violence. It took a hundred years in Europe for secularity to really take root. But it did. And there were many reasons for it. But religious violence clearly played a part. Perhaps in the future, Mumbai will be viewed as playing the same kind of part.