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### February 23, 2009: The Decline of Islam

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Title: The Decline of Islam

Date: 2009-02-23T08:10:00.001-05:00

2/23/2009--At the height of the Wars of Religion, in the 16th and 17th centuries, it would have been difficult to predict that these wars, in which religious belief was so important, would become the beginning of the Great Secularization of the West. But the story was not surprising in retrospect. The conflicts between Catholics and Protestants delegitimized religion. People began to feel that if this is what religion led to, it might be better not to be religious and to limit the influence of religion. Something similar may happen in the Muslim world and more quickly than one might think. The victory of conservative Islamic forces, including the Taliban, in Pakistan's Northwest region has led by all reports to the demolition of over one hundred schools for girls. This one symbol is likely to delegitimize Islam as a normative force among young Muslims, and not just women. Of course, this one interpretation of Islam is by no means dominant in the world. But that is not the point. Neither was the killing in Europe normative. Rather, when injustice is perpetrated in the name of religion, the norms that become the standard for the future are no longer those of religion. They come from elsewhere. Most people in the world will see hostility to the education of women as intolerable. This act of destroying schools is nothing like the burqa, which some women choose as an antidote to Western sexism. This act is the unmasking of religion as injustice.