

The Economist & Soft-Pedaling Islam

by Bruce Bawer



Yes, sprawling Muslim families on lifelong welfare are draining the treasuries of Western Europe. Muslim imams rule ever more imperiously over sharia enclaves in major cities from Manchester to Marseilles to Munich. Muslim youth gangs have turned ever-expanding sections of those cities into war zones and caused increasing numbers of Jews to flee the continent. And Muslim husbands who keep multiple wives at once and treat them like property – while forcing their daughters into arranged cousin marriages – have made a joke of Europe’s supposed devotion to human rights and sexual equality.

But never mind! Banish your worries! For years, that most smug, supercilious, and self-important of glossy newsweeklies, *The Economist*, has been taking a special interest in Islam, and especially on the phenomenon of Islam in the West. And for years it’s been assuring us that Islam

shouldn't trouble our little minds – that any problems incorrectly associated with it have nothing whatsoever to do with Islam itself; that most of those problems are, when you examine them dispassionately, our fault in one way or another; and that in the long run everything will be just fine.

Why does *The Economist's* take on this topic matter? Because the mag, ubiquitous on international flights between leading business hubs, arguably exudes even more of an air of obnoxious authoritativeness – of absolutely definitive definitiveness – than the *New York Times*.

Its secret? While other long-lasting periodicals like *Time* fade in significance (and try to stay alive by running ever more inane, sensational nonsense), *The Economist*, based in the two top global cities, London and New York – and publishing its articles in a language that is its own unique, precious cross between British and American English – postures itself as having taken the high road.

Marketing itself to upscale readers as a calm, cool, preternaturally sober-minded compendium of objective reporting from every corner of the earth (and its lack of bylines makes every sentence sound like an *ex cathedra* expert statement), *The Economist* has garnered a reputation as an indispensable source of trustworthy information for serious cosmopolites who consider it their responsibility as citizens of the world to stay well-informed.

Consequently, *The Economist's* perennially reassuring pontifications on Islam have had a meaningful – and deleterious – impact.

Its logic on the subject seems always to have been more or less as follows: economies are all-important; globalism is all-important; open borders are all-important; and sooner or later, inevitably, dollars to doughnuts, all those gazillions of Muslim immigrants in the West – or their children, or maybe

their grandchildren – will go off the dole, pour into the workforce, and, at long last, provide Western European employers with a vast and wonderful supply of cheap labor. And what a beautiful day that will be for the global economy!

My awareness of *The Economist's* line on these matters dates back to 2006, when I published *While Europe Slept*, my book warning about the threat of Islam in Europe. In their review, the mag's anonymous scribes [looked down](#) upon it with a world-weary sigh.

Yes, they tacitly accepted that jihad is a thing, and they didn't exactly deny that European leaders' gung-ho multiculturalism might eventuate in cultural suicide. Still, they argued, my book was "[w]ildly exaggerated" and "cast...too wide a net." Surely there was nothing terrible to fear from "the great mass of ordinary Muslims" in Europe! They cited another new book whose author, Jylle Clausen, had "questioned 300 European Muslim leaders and found that most viewed human rights, rather than Islam, as their primary political belief system." So there!

Also, they wished I was "more informed and more nuanced." They quoted yet another book, this one by Milton Viorst, to show what they meant by "informed" and "nuanced." What they meant was placing the Islamization of Europe in the context of "the centuries-old conflict between the Arab world and the Christian West," which, they suggested, was initiated by the Western colonization of Arab and Muslim lands.

(Of course, the era of Western colonization was preceded by centuries of violent and bloodthirsty Arab attempts to conquer Europe. But apparently *The Economist* didn't want to go back as far as the Battle of Tours and the Siege of Vienna – let alone to the founding of Islam as an unequivocal warrior faith.)

In 2015, *The Economist* was still singing the same tune. On the very day – yes, *the very day* – that 12 people were slaughtered

by jihadists at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris, the mag [worried aloud](#) that many Europeans, in reaction to the massacre, would “again question the compatibility of Islam with secular-minded, liberal European values.” God forbid!

Concerns about Islamic terrorism, *The Economist* conceded, weren't *entirely* unfounded, given that the killings in Paris had been preceded by other such unpleasantness elsewhere in Europe “and a recent upward trend in arrests for religiously-inspired terrorism.” But then came the words of blessed assurance: “Perceptions can easily run ahead of reality.” In 2013, there were “more arrests for other types of terrorism (motivated by separatism, for example) in Europe” than for Islamic terrorism. Also, “European publics wildly overestimate the proportion of their populations that is Muslim: an Ipsos-Mori poll in 2014 found that on average French respondents thought 31% of their compatriots were Muslim, against an actual figure closer to 8%.”

Message: calm down, all you silly, excitable twits, and learn from our magisterially phlegmatic manner and elevated, indeed Olympian, perspective. As Kipling wrote: “If you can keep your head when all about you,” etc.

A “Special Report”

As it turned out, *The Economist* had only just begun to work at quelling Islam-spawned anxieties. In 2019 came a series of [“special reports”](#) on “Islam in the West” under the umbrella headline “Here to stay.” The idea was plainly to be as upbeat as the facts could allow – and then some. For example, an article headlined “The 30m Muslims living in Europe and America are gradually becoming integrated” (key word: *gradually* – very, very gradually) began with the sanguine affirmation that “Europe's relationship with Islam” has been “more conflicted” in the past than it is now.

This time around, by way of making the present day look less

bleak, *The Economist* chose to admit that in the Middle Ages, Islam “entered Europe...by the sword” and had to be “driven out” by force centuries later. Yes, jihad still exists today, but – that mantra again – “[j]ihadists make up a minuscule fringe of Muslims in the West” and public fears of Islam are largely the product of by “[f]ar-right” propaganda.

While treating the elections of Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar as signs of successful integration and maintaining that “Muslim schoolchildren in America” are “bullied because of their faith” (owing to – what else? – the current “surge of white nationalism”), *The Economist* was silent about those women’s anti-Americanism and Jew-hatred and about the very real phenomenon of bullying – and far worse – by Muslim kids in Western Europe, which has forced countless families to move, countless teachers to quit, and countless infidel kids to stay in their houses instead of going outside to play.

A second “special report” repeated yet again the mag’s pet credo that “[t]he overwhelming majority of Muslims is [sic] law-abiding” but that their image has been damaged by a few “[r]adicalised jihadists.” Now ignoring the 1400 years of jihad that had been acknowledged in the first “special report” *in the same issue*, this article reiterated the mag’s 2006 claim that “[j]ihadism has its origins in the liberation struggles against Western colonialism in the Middle East.”

Weirdly, though, the piece went on to concede that al-Qaeda’s “view of the world” is “rooted in classical texts” – a way of saying, without saying it too explicitly, that jihad (that is, the armed subjugation of infidels in the name of Allah and his Prophet) is, yes, commanded in the Qur’an and has been at the very heart of Islam ever since. (Never say that the folks at *The Economist* aren’t masters of evasion, omission, euphemism, soothing lies, and slippery half-truths!)

Once again we were assured that a vanishingly small percentage of Western Muslims are jihadists. But what percentage of

Western Muslims applaud jihad? What percentage would like to see sharia law in the West? How many Muslims would make homosexuality a capital crime? The answers to these and other such questions, available elsewhere, are terrifying – and hence nowhere to be found in *The Economist*.

A third “special report” sought to find something positive about the fact that “Islam is a growing social force in Britain’s second city.” Beginning with a cozy picture of interfaith harmony, the piece offered a lively portrait of Birmingham’s Central Mosque, to which “Muslims come not only to pray but to buy books, receive instruction, marry, divorce and send off their dead.”

Interesting. Exactly which books? What kind of instruction? How many of the marriages are forced? How many of the dead are victims of “honor killings”? *The Economist* didn’t care to go there. Nor did it mention that Muslim men can divorce simply by uttering a single sentence, while Muslim wives can spend years trying (often unsuccessfully) to escape even the most abusive of marriages.

Yes, the article admitted that Birmingham “has a reputation as an incubator of jihad,” but assured readers that its image in the U.S. has been harmed by exaggerations on Fox News, and in any case balanced out the grim reality of jihad by noting that on the previous March 21 five Birmingham mosques had “suffered sledgehammer attacks.”

Sorry to hear that. And precisely what percentage of Birmingham Muslims are responsible for robberies, rapes, and other serious crimes against non-Muslims? How many non-Muslims commit crimes against Muslims? *The Economist* didn’t touch that one, either.

As it happened, this tribute to Britain’s wonderfully multicultural second city proved to be a tad ill-timed: only a few months after it appeared, it was [reported](#) – but not in *The*

Economist – that 490 children in Birmingham had been raped by members of Muslim “grooming gangs.” (And how, incidentally, does *The Economist* address the Muslim “grooming gangs”? By trying to [minimize](#) them: “A large majority of those who sexually abuse children in Britain are white men.” [Or](#): “The worst parts of British cities are safer than the worst parts of American cities.” [Or](#): “Sex workers [are] the biggest victims of rape [in Britain].”)

A New Leaf?

Anyhow, so it went at *The Economist*, year after year. Then, this spring, in what looked like possible signs of a sea change, a couple of curious things happened. First, in May, believe it or not, the mag [entertained](#) the question of whether “something happen[ed] in Muslim thought” a millennium or so ago to make “the Islamic world resistant to social, intellectual and scientific innovation.”

Citing a new book on Islam by Mustafa Akyol – with chapters entitled “How We Lost Universalism”, “How We Lost Morality,” and “Why We Lost Reason, Really” – *The Economist* noted that Akyol hopes to see the Islamic world adopt American-style mosque-state separation, although it pointed out that another writer, Shadi Hamid, feels “that Islam has always been – and will probably remain – relatively theocratic, not individualistic.” The article concluded with the observation – startlingly honest, given *The Economist*’s record on the topic, but also pretty obvious – that while frank discussions about Islam can take place in Washington think tanks, “there are very few historically Muslim countries where debate is so free and wide-ranging.”

That was in May. Then, in June, *The Economist* reported on Ed Husain’s new book about Muslim Britain, *Among the Mosques*, whose argument the mag summed up as follows: “The British establishment expected Islamic migrants to melt into wider society and relax their religious views,” but instead

they formed sharia enclaves where “[m]osques run schools and pronounce on Islamic law,” restaurants seat men and women separately, and shops sell “books that advocate stoning gays or keeping wives in purdah or waging jihad.”

Exactly the kind of stuff, in short, that *The Economist* chided me for saying in *While Europe Slept*. In 2006, I was a hysteric. But now, in 2021, the mag pronounced that there are “good reasons to be worried” about Islam in Europe.

About frigging time.

How did this happen? One guess: in these May and June articles, it was easier for *The Economist* to tell a little more than usual of the ugly truth about Islam because, instead of saying things that might cause its editors to be lumped in with all those vulgar Islamophobes, it was merely passing on the observations of three men whose views couldn’t easily be dismissed because (a) they were raised Muslim and (b) in the eyes of *The Economist*, they’re princes of the Church: Akyol is at the Cato Institute; Hamid is at Brookings; and Husain sits on the Council on Foreign Relations.

Alas, any notion that *The Economist* had changed its tune was dashed on July 24. At first, things looked promising. Under the [headline](#) “Guns galore: Sweden is being shot up: Gun crime is on the rise,” the mag recounted a series of recent disturbances in suburbs of Gothenburg – a gang fight, a grocery-store shooting, a cop-killing, a barber-shop murder. “In the past 15 years,” *The Economist* noted, “Sweden has had Europe’s highest rate of death by shooting.”

Heavens to Betsy! Had the mag’s editors decided that the time had come to admit that mass immigration had transformed once-placid Sweden into a hellhole?

Not exactly. Yes, the article did say that “[r]ecent immigrants, many of them Somali, have failed to integrate” into Swedish society and that “[t]he Syrian migrant crisis of

2015 has led to more ghettoisation.” But these were at best half-truths: it’s not just recent Somali immigrants who’ve failed to integrate into Sweden, and ghettoization was a catastrophe well before the Syrian crisis.

Moreover, despite mentioning these problems, *The Economist* insisted that all that gun crime in Sweden is caused exclusively – exclusively, mind you – by “illegal drugs and ill-feeling between jobless, marginalised young men and the police.”

Yes, “ill-feeling.” Like the “ill-feeling” between the Nazis and the Jews.

Entirely missing were the words “Islam” and “Muslim.” Or any hint that the youths in question aren’t exactly “marginalised” but are, rather, members of self-segregating religious communities run according to sharia law.

Now, if you follow the online Scandinavian media that report more candidly on these matters, you know quite a number of things that *The Economist* still doesn’t want to deign to tell you. For example, you know that the Muslim thugs taking over Sweden belong to extensive “clan networks” based in their lands of origin. You know that they not only despise Swedes but have zero respect for cops. You know that Swedish police (who make, on average, \$30,400 a year) consider their country a “war zone” but have insufficient training, equipment, and manpower to fight the enemy – and that the politicians and other authorities, in any case, prefer not to heed their increasingly dire warnings.

The Economist chose not to mention any of this. Nor did it mention the Gothenburg police officer who broke into tears during a TV interview in July while describing Sweden’s ever-darkening crime picture; or the other cop who, also in July, complained to a freelance journalist that his job isn’t to arrest Muslim gangsters but to avoid “trigger[ing]” them – and

that while ordinary Swedes get fined for minor infractions, Muslim gangsters get let off for felonies (and the more crimes they commit, the more gently and leniently the system treats them).

No, although things briefly looked promising a few weeks ago, it appears as though *The Economist* is back to its old form. "Fear not!" it urges those unsteady, suspicious-minded souls who foolishly regard the growth of Western Islam with dread. But let's face it: there are likely very few unsteady souls among its regular readers. No, they're Masters of the Universe, and as they sip their champagne in first-class seats on the flight from JFK to Heathrow and page through the latest reliably unflappable issue of the worldliest of weeklies, all they need, so far as the Religion of Peace is concerned, is a quick and authoritative reassurance that Islam in the West – whatever the bigoted red-capped rabble may say – is still not a problem.

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