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ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM
IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTHWEST ASIA

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1. Introduction

Political Islam, or more commonly “Islamic fundamentalism”, remains a major presence in government and in oppositional politics from North Africa to Southeast Asia. In recent decades new Islamic republics have emerged in Sudan, Iran and Afghanistan. Islamists have been elected to parliament, served in cabinets and been president, prime minister or deputy prime minister in countries as diverse as Sudan, Egypt, Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia. At the same time opposition movements and radical extremist organizations have sought to destabilize Muslim countries and attacked government officials and institutions in Muslim countries and in the West. Americans have witnessed attacks against American embassies and personnel from Tanzania and Kenya to Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Pakistan. International terrorist attacks have been accompanied by domestic acts of terrorism such as the bombing of New York’s World Trade Center. In recent years, Osama bin Laden has become a symbol of the export of international terrorism with America often identified as a favourite target.

Political Islam in power and in politics has raised many issues and questions: “Should the West fear a transnational Islamic threat or clash of civilizations?”, “Are Islam and democracy incompatible?”, “What are the implications of an Islamic government for pluralism, minority and women’s rights”, “How representative are Islamists”, and “Are there Islamic moderates?” Understanding the nature of political Islam today, and in particular the issues and questions that have emerged from the experience of the recent past, remains critical for governments, policymakers, and students of international politics alike.

1.1. What is Political Islam?

The causes of the Islamic resurgence are many: socio-political, religio-cultural and economic.¹ However, common causes and concerns are identifiable: the failure of secular nationalism (liberal nationalism, Arab nationalism and socialism) to provide a strong sense of national identity to gain independence from foreign influence, and to produce strong and prosperous societies. Governments (most of which are non-elected, authoritarian, and “security states”, that is, dependent upon security forces) have failed to establish or strengthen their political legitimacy. They have been criticized for a failure to achieve economic self-sufficiency or prosperity, to stem the growing gap between rich and poor, to halt widespread corruption, liberate Palestine, resist Western political and cultural hegemony. Both the political and religious establishments have been criticized: the former as a minority of western, secular elites more concerned with power and privilege than faith and social justice; the latter as a religious leadership co-opted by governments who support or control mosques and religious universities and institutions.

¹ For studies of the Islamic resurgence, see Haddad, Y.Y., Voll, J.O. and Esposito, J.L. (eds.), *The Contemporary Islamic Revival: A Critical Survey and Bibliography*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1991; Haddad, Y.Y. and Esposito, J.L. (eds.) *Contemporary Islamic Revival Since 1988: A Critical Survey and Bibliography*, Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1997; Esposito, J.L., *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?*, 3 ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1999; Esposito, J.L., *Islam and Politics*, 4 ed., Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998; Piscatori, J.P. and Eickelman, D.F., *Muslim Politics*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997; and Ayubi, N., *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, London: Routledge, 1991

In the Arab world the disastrous defeat of Arab forces by Israel in the 1967 war discredited Arab nationalism and triggered a soul-searching that questioned dependence on the West and the appropriateness and viability of western models of development. In South Asia, the 1971 Pakistan-Bangladesh civil war undermined any notion of Islam and Muslim nationalism as the glue that could hold together the ethnically and linguistically diverse Muslim population. Lebanon's civil war, Iran's revolution of 1978-1979 signaled similar catalytic events or conditions, the failures of Middle East economies in the 1980s triggered "bread riots", elections and the emergence of an Islamic electoral alternative in Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, and Algeria. Afghanistan's *mujahideen* became the effective alternative to the state in responding to the Soviet occupation. The rise of the Taliban and their restoration of law and order were initially welcomed by many as an antidote to the years of inter-*mujahideen* rivalry and devastation that followed the withdrawal of the Soviets.

Although Iran offered the most visible and sustained critique of the West, embodying both moderate and more extremist/rejectionist anti-Westernism, the failures of the West (both its models of development and its role as an ally), and fear of the threat of westernization, its cultural penetration, have been pervasive themes of the resurgence. Many blame the ills of their societies on the excessive influence of and dependence (political, economic, military, and socio-cultural) upon the West, in particular the superpowers America and the former Soviet Union. Modernization, as a process of progressive westernization and secularization and increasingly globalization, have been regarded as forms of neocolonialism exported by the West and imposed by local elites, a disease that undermines religious and cultural identity and values, replacing them with imported foreign values and models of development.

While the primary concerns of Islamic movements are domestic or national, international issues and actors have also played important roles in Muslim politics. Among the more important have been: the Arab-Israeli conflict and the liberation of Jerusalem; the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan; and the "liberation" of Bosnia, Kashmir, and Chechnya. Countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran and Libya have sought to extend their influence internationally, supporting government Islamization programs as well as Islamist movements.

1.1.1. Islamic Movements: Leadership and Ideology

Islamic revivalism is in many ways the successor of failed nationalist programs from the Arab nationalism and socialism of North Africa and the Middle East to the Muslim nationalism of post-independence Pakistan. The founders of many Islamic movements were formerly participants in nationalist movements, ranging from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's founder, Hasan al-Banna, to Tunisia's Rashid Ghannouchi of the Renaissance Party, Algeria's Abbasi Madani of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS - Front Islamique du Salut), and Turkey's Dr Ecmettin Erbakan, founder of the Welfare (Refah) Party. Islamic movements have claimed to offer a more authentic, indigenous Islamic alternative or solution, a third alternative to capitalism and communism or socialism.

Islamic movements have been particularly strong among the younger generation, university graduates and young professionals who are recruited from the mosques and universities. Organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, and Kuwait as well as South Asia's Jamaat-i-Islami consist in great part of university graduates and professionals. Contrary to popular expectations, their strength is not in the religious faculties and humanities so much as in science, engineering, education, law, and medicine. Thus, for example, Hassan al-Turabi, leader of Sudan's National Islamic Front, holds a doctorate in law from the Sorbonne and the senior leadership of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood includes judges, lawyers, and physicians. The leader of Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front, Abbasi Madani, earned a doctorate in education from a British university. Turkey's Ecmettin Erbakan obtained his doctorate in Germany, Jordan's Ishaq Furhan and other leaders of Jordan's and Kuwait's Muslim Brotherhood have earned doctorates in America.

In general, Islamic movements are urban-based and draw heavily from the lower middle and middle classes. A major portion of their leadership and membership could be described as middle class professionals. Financial support has come from governments such as Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iran, and the Gulf states and from wealthy individuals within their countries. In many Muslim countries, an alternative elite has emerged, modern educated but more self-consciously islamically oriented and committed to social and political activism as a means of creating a more Islamic society or system of government. This social phenomenon is reflected in the presence and often dominance of Islamists in professional unions or associations of lawyers, engineers, professors, and physicians. Where permitted to live and participate in society, they are found in every sector: government, the professions, and even the military.

At the heart of the revivalist ideological worldview are the following beliefs:

- . the Muslim world is in a state of decline
- . its cause is departure from the straight path of Islam;
- . its cure is a return to Islam in personal and public life that will ensure the restoration of Islamic identity, values, and power;
- . Islam is a total or comprehensive way of life as stipulated in the Qur'an, God's revelation, mirrored in the example of Muhammad and the nature of the first Muslim community-state, and embodied in the comprehensive nature of the *shar'ia*, God's revealed law;
- . thus, the renewal and revitalization of Muslim governments and societies require the restoration or reimplementation of Islamic law, the blueprint for an Islamically guided and socially just state and society;
- . while the Westernization and secularization of society are condemned, modernization as such is not. Science and technology are accepted, but the pace, direction and extent of change are to be subordinated to Islamic belief and values in order to guard against the penetration and excessive dependence on Western values.

Radical movements go beyond these principles and often operate on the following assumptions:

- Islam and the West are locked in an ongoing battle which stretches back to the early days of Islam, is heavily influenced by the legacy of the Crusades and European colonialism, and is the product today of a Judeo-Christian conspiracy. This conspiracy is the result of superpower neo-colonialism and the power of Zionism. The West (Britain, France, and especially the United States) is blamed for its support of un-Islamic or unjust regimes and biased support for Israel in the face of Palestinian displacement. Violence against such governments and their representatives as well as Western multinationals is regarded as legitimate self-defense.
- Islam is not simply an ideological alternative for Muslim societies but a theological and political imperative. Since it is God's command, implementation must be immediate, not gradual, and the obligation to implement is incumbent on all true Muslims. Therefore, those who hesitate, remain apolitical, or resist - individuals and governments - are no longer to be regarded as Muslims. They are atheists or unbelievers, enemies of God, against whom all true Muslims must wage holy war (*jihad*).

While the majority of Islamic activists seek to work within the system, to bring about change from within society, a small but significant radical extremist minority believe that they have a mandate from God to implement/impose God's will and that because the rulers in the Muslim world are authoritarian and anti-Islamic, violent change is necessary. They seek to topple governments, seize power, and impose their vision or interpretation of Islam upon society.

1.1.2. The Quiet Revolution: From Periphery to the Centre

Fear of Islam and its demonization throughout the 1980s was justified by its portrayal as a monolithic enemy, anti-government and extremist. However, since the 1990s the presence of a more broadly based, diverse reality has become increasingly evident. Beneath the radical monolithic facade, the world of small, marginalized groups of extremists on the periphery of society, a quiet revolution has taken place. While a rejectionist minority has sought to impose change from above through holy wars, many others reaffirm their faith and pursue a bottom-up approach, seeking a gradual transformation or Islamization of society through words and example, preaching and social and political activism.

In many Muslim countries, Islamic organizations and associations have become part and parcel of mainstream society, institutional forces in civil society, active in social reform, providing educational, medical, dental, legal, and social welfare services. Schools, hospitals, clinics, legal societies, and family assistance programs, Islamic banks and insurance companies, and publishing houses have mushroomed. Thus, an Islamically-oriented infrastructure has been created, offering much needed services cheaply and effectively. As such, they often constitute a quiet but visible implicit critique of the failures of governments to provide adequate services.

Social activism has been accompanied by increased political participation. In the late 1980s and 1990s, failed economies, discredited governmental development policies, led to political crises, mass demonstrations ("food riots") and strikes, resulting in limited political liberalization. Governments (Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan) held elections in which Islamic activists ran as individual candidates (Egypt and Tunisia refused to grant legal recognition as political parties to the Muslim Brotherhood and

Ennahda respectively) and in some cases as political parties (Jordan and Algeria). In the post-Gulf war Kuwait and Yemen held elections. Saudi Arabia created an appointed consultative council to the King in response to demands for greater participation and government accountability.

The responses of governments to Islamists, who have become significant actors in civil society, as well as events in Iran and Afghanistan, are keys to understanding the present and future of political Islam.

2. The Many Faces of Political Islam: Case Studies

2.1. North Africa

North Africa provides contrasting experiences and results of state responses to political Islam.² North Africa, like Turkey, had been believed to be beyond the reach of any serious challenge from Islamic activism. Tunisia had had one-man (Habib Bourghiba) rule and Algeria one party (FLN - Front de Libération Nationale) rule during the decades after gaining independence. Both were ruled by strong secular minded elites. It was electoral politics not violent radicalism that signaled the potential strength of Islamic movements as Tunisia's Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI - Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique - later renamed Ennahda) and Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) emerged as effective opposition movements/parties.

After seizing power from Bourghiba in 1987, Zein Abidine Ben Ali promised democratization and held parliamentary elections in April 1989. In early 1989, MTI had renamed itself Ennahda (Hizb al-Nahda, The Renaissance Party) in order to comply with President Ben Ali's stated position that no single group should monopolize the claim to be Islamic since all Tunisians were Muslim. As one of Ennahda's leaders declared, "[we] accepted the rules of the game ... we want to act within the framework of democracy".³ Yet, in spite of this, the Government did not permit it to participate as a legal political party. Nevertheless, high inflation, growing unemployment, and increased poverty significantly strengthened their position. Islamic candidates won 14.5 per cent of the vote nationwide and a stunning 30 per cent in cities like Tunis, Gabes, and Sousse. The Tunisian Government's response was not to enfranchise but to repress Ennahda through widespread arrests, the use of torture and special military courts, actions that were strongly criticized by international human rights organizations. The Tunisian Government's brief flirtation with democratization came to an end as President Ben Ali in 1993 and 1998 won re-election by 99 per cent of the vote.

Ennahda combined the criteria of Islam with that of democracy to critique the Tunisian Government and to serve as a platform for popular support. For Rashid Ghannouchi, leader of democracy, popular sovereignty and the role of the state ("the state is not something from God but from the people ... the state has to serve the benefit of the Muslims"), multi-party elections, and constitutional law are all part of a

² For studies on the emergence and development of political Islam in North Africa, see Burgat, F., *The Islamic Movement in North Africa*, 2 ed., Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 1997; Shahin, E., *Political Ascent: Contemporary Islamic Movements in North Africa: State, Culture, & Society in Arab North Africa*, Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1996

³ MTI (Ennahda) member, Personal interview, Tunis, 21 July 1989.

“new Islamic thinking” whose roots and legitimacy are found in a fresh interpretation or reinterpretation of Islamic sources.⁴ Ghannoushi chided the West for not promoting its democratic ideals: “While the West criticizes Islamic governments for not being democratic, it also supports governments who are not democratic and are keeping Islamic movements from developing their ideas.”⁵

In contrast to Tunisia, Algerian Islamists participated in electoral politics as political parties not just as individual candidates. Following the bloody anti-government riots of October 1988, the Government felt constrained to hold elections. Algeria, long regarded the most monolithic, single-party political system in the Arab world, held multi-party elections which included the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), North Africa’s first legal Islamic political party, led by Shaykh Ali Abbasi al-Madani. Islamic groups/parties had flourished as Algerian state-socialism failed to resolve its social and economic problems. The FIS, with a national organization and an effective mosque and social welfare network, emerged as the largest of these groups and one of the strongest opposition parties.

FIS support included small-business owners and prosperous merchants, civil servants, university professors, physicians, lawyers and other professionals. They constituted an alternative elite or counter elite, modern educated but more Islamically oriented, pursuing a quest for a national identity that incorporated more authentically Algeria’s religio-cultural heritage and a government that responded more effectively to the political, economic and moral failures of the FLN. The FIS also drew substantial support from the unemployed (Algeria’s unemployment rate was more than 30 per cent), socially marginalized youth. Lacking jobs and housing, they became fixtures on the streets and in the alleyways, the “hittists” (those who lean against the walls).

In the June 1990 municipal elections, the first multi-party election since independence in 1962, the FIS scored a stunning victory, capturing 54 per cent of the vote, while the FLN garnered 34 per cent. Despite the arrest of the FIS leaders, Abbasi Madani and Ali Belhadj, and gerrymandering to redraw districts more favorably, the FLN failed to prevent the FIS from an even more surprising electoral victory in the June 1997 parliamentary elections. Amidst the euphoria and celebration of Islamists within Algeria and across the Muslim world, the Algerian military intervened, forced the resignation of the President, arrested FIS leaders, imprisoned more than 10,000 in desert camps/prisons, outlawed the FIS and seized its assets.

Both the authoritarian governments of Tunisia and Algeria were threatened by the performance of non-violent Islamic movements in mainstream politics. President Ben Ali as well as the Algerian military tightened their control on power, moved quickly to repress any significant legal opposition or political alternative through arrests and trials before special military courts, trials that were denounced by international human rights organizations. While President Ben Ali was able to decapitate the movement (for the present), driving its leaders into exile or underground, the Algerian military set in motion a spiral of indiscriminate violence and counter violence.

⁴ Rashid Ghannoushi, Personal interview, Wayland MA, USA, 15 December 1989. See also, Ghannoushi, R. *Fi al-mubadi al-Islamiyya li dimuqratiyya wa al-usul al-hukm al-Islamiyya* [The Islamic Principles of Democracy and Fundamentals of Islamic Government], n.p., 1410/1990.

⁵ Abdelfattah Mourou, Personal interview, Tunis, 23 July 1989

Responding to the massive crackdown of military and security forces, with many of their leaders imprisoned or in exile, many moderate non-violent FIS members turned to the FIS militia, the AIS (Armée Islamique du Salut - Islamic Salvation Army). The result was a protracted civil war and the polarization of society as the majority of the population found itself caught between two competing extremist factions. Violence, retaliation and revenge became the order of the day in a war of government and Islamic militia extremism. The *éradicateurs*, a faction of hardline military and security forces, who rejected dialogue and believed the only strategy was the eradication of Islamism, became locked in a deadly war with the equally uncompromising radical Armed Islamic Group (GIS - Groupe Islamique Armé).⁶ The influence of hardliners could be seen in 1995 when the Government refused to recognize or participate in a summit of Algeria's major secular, non-Islamist and Islamist leaders and political parties sponsored by the St. Egidio Catholic community in Rome. The parties' fourteen-point agreement praised by the United States and positively responded to by France, a close ally of Algeria, was rejected by the military as a capitulation to the Islamists.

The late 1990s were marked by continued brutality and bloodshed as the number of fatalities rose to 100,000, new parliamentary and presidential elections were held in 1997 and 1999 respectively (with the FIS excluded from participation) and a ceasefire was called between the Government and the AIS, the military wing of the FIS. Parliamentary elections were marred by criticisms from UN observers and charges of massive fraud by losing parties as President (formerly General) Liamine Zeroual's National Democratic Rally won 156 of 380 seats. Although the FIS was prohibited from participating, two Islamic parties, the Movement for Society and Peace (formerly Hamas) and Ennahda, won 69 and 38 seats respectively. Presidential elections in April 1999 were flawed by the last minute withdrawal of all six opposition presidential candidates who charged that the military had rigged the elections in favor of Abdelaziz Bouteflika,⁷ who received less than 30 per cent of the votes cast by the less than 25 per cent of registered voters who participated.⁸

While the military backed government remains in control, conditions for national reconciliation and stability remain fragile. The military continues to dominate if not control the political process. Bouteflika maintained his refusal to lift the eight year ban on the FIS or to allow autonomous Islamic groups to emerge as political parties, and has done very little to significantly strengthen civil society. Algeria continues to be plagued by long-standing severe economic and social problems: an official unemployment rate of 30 per cent (which some put at 50 per cent), an acute housing shortage, an unresolved national/cultural identity crisis, and a "gap between a tiny minority of superrich and overwhelming majority of the people impoverished by rising prices and cuts in social benefits".⁹

⁶ For background and analysis see: Vandewalle, D. Islam in Algeria: Religion, Culture and Opposition in a Rentier State in Esposito, J.L., (ed.) *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism, or Reform?*, Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997, Ch. 2; Williams, I. Algeria: A Deaf Ear to Amnesty, *Middle East International*, 21 November 1997, p. 15 ff.

⁷ Entelis, J.P., Bouteflika's Algeria: Prospects for a Democratic Peace, *Middle East Insight*, November-December 1999, p. 7

⁸ Quandt, W.B., Bouteflika in Perspective, *Middle East Insight*, November-December 1999, p. 13

⁹ Tiemceni, R., From Bullets to Ballots, *Middle East Insight*, November-December 1999, p. 12

Algeria epitomizes the extent to which the electoral performances of Islamic movements defied the conventional wisdom and ironically came to be viewed as a new threat. While most feared and were on their guard against “other Irans”, the FIS victory in Algeria raised the spectre of an Islamic movement coming to power through democratic elections. Ballots, not bullets, proved to be even more worrisome for many world leaders. Yet, as one Algerian expert has noted:

There is now a preponderance of evidence from Algeria’s last six years to indicate that the human suffering, environmental devastation and potential regional destabilization have been infinitely greater than they could have been under any imaginable scenario involving an Islamist regime coming to power through universal suffrage. It is hard to dispute that the fundamental source of conflict is a denial of popular legitimacy. To portray it as cultural or ideological, secular or fundamentalist, is misleading and plays into the hands of extremists and anti-democrats alike. What is at stake is an increase or decrease of power and privilege.¹⁰

2.2. Egypt, Iran and Turkey

2.2.1. Egypt: The Challenge of Radicalism and Mainstream Islamic Reform

Egypt reveals the diversity of political Islam (radical and mainstream) even within a single country context and the extent to which Islamist responses and tactics are often a reaction to government policies. Many in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution and the assassination of President Sadat, feared Iran’s export of Islamic revolution and therefore reduced Islamic political activism or “Islamic fundamentalism” solely to radicalism and terrorism. However, political Islam has become a major social and political force in Egyptian society, spanning the spectrum from violent to non-violent organizations. While the Muslim Brotherhood under Anwar Sadat and his successor, Hosni Mubarak, has participated in civil society, radical organizations have employed violence, attacking government officials, institutions, fellow Muslims, Christians and foreign tourists.

In the 1990s the Government launched a counter offensive that often seemed to be a war, against the campaign of violence and terrorism waged by radical groups such as Islamic Jihad and the Gamaa Islamiyya in their attempt to destabilize and overthrow the Egyptian state. The struggle has cost more than 1,000 lives and often led to charges by human rights organizations, the international media and experts that the attempt to capture and eradicate extremists had degenerated into indiscriminate state repression. More than 20,000 Islamists have been imprisoned, many detained without charge and subject to torture. Extralegal military courts that exclude the right of appeal have been created, laws have been enacted to restrict freedom of the press, take control of mosques and prevent elected Islamists from leading professional associations. The slaughter of 58 foreign tourists at Luxor in November 1997 seemed

¹⁰ Amirouche, H., *Algeria’s Islamist Revolution: The People Versus Democracy?*, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 5, January 1998, p. 100

to indicate the impotence of the state. However, by 2000, the government of President Mubarak government had clearly gained the upper hand.

Imprisoned leaders of the Gamaa Islamiyya declared a unilateral ceasefire; the Government has released thousands of its members. Islamic Jihad has been significantly weakened, many of its leaders imprisoned or in exile. Despite the massacre of 20 Christians in a village south of Cairo on New Year's Eve, 31 December 1999, it does not seem to have been done by an organization and most observers believe Islamic radicalism has been contained for the present.

Despite the apparent success of the Government in containing Islamic radicalism, the impact of Islamic revivalism on mainstream Egyptian society has been more significant. The Muslim Brotherhood provides an example of the quiet revolution that has been taking place in Egypt's cities and towns. Islamic activism has become institutionalized, part of mainstream society. Islamic schools, clinics, hospitals and social services as well as Islamic banks and publishing houses offer an alternative set of social institutions, a quiet indictment of the Government's inability to respond to peoples' needs. The performance of Islamists at the polls has been equally impressive. Prevented by law from participating as a legal party, the Muslim Brotherhood formed coalitions and alliances and emerged as the leading opposition in those parliamentary elections in which they participated.

In order to contain its non-violent Islamic opposition, the government of President Mubarak in recent years, like many governments in the Middle East, has argued that there is no real difference between Islamic moderates and extremists. The regime adopted a sweeping policy of repression: "Seizing on the violence of the radicals as justification for a strike against the one force that can effectively challenge its legitimacy, moderate Islam, the regime struck at the Islamic Awakening in all its manifestations."¹¹ As the director of state security in central Egypt observed in an attempt to justify the Mubarak government's crackdown and arrests of 1,000 opposition activists, many of whom were members of the Muslim Brotherhood, at a time when Mubarak faced a democratic challenge from the Brotherhood in presidential elections: "At present, we admit, the Brotherhood are not engaged in violence ... Even though we have no concrete evidence for a court, I have to move. The security of the state is at risk."¹² The Government's policy of repression drew sharp criticisms from human rights organizations.

Because the Brotherhood and other Islamists have been top vote getters in professional association or union (law, medicine, engineering) elections, the government of President Mubarak introduced new laws to control association elections. Similar controls have been implemented to control university faculty and student elections. In addition, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has attempted to take control of Egypt's private, independent (as distinct from government supported and controlled) mosques.

¹¹ Baker, R.W., Invidious Comparisons: Realism, Postmodernism, and Centrist Islamic Movements in Egypt in Esposito, J.L. (ed.), *Political Islam ...*, p. 127-8

¹² Sherry, V.N., Egypt's Trampling of Rights Fosters Extremism, *The New York Times*, 15 April 1993. For an analysis of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights' report for 1996, see The Year in Review, *Civil Society*, July 1997, pp. 11-12, and Salaheddin, E., Report Shows Human Rights Deteriorating in Egypt, *The Middle East Times*, 28 June 1998

By the year 2000, the Brotherhood seemed to succumb to government pressures and the rigged elections of the late 1990s. In 1990, the National Democratic Party (NDP) won 94 percent of the votes and in the 1995 elections - widely viewed as Egypt's most violent and fraudulent ever - the NDP won 430 of 444 seats. (In July 2000, the Supreme Constitutional Court had ruled the 1990 and 1995 election procedures unconstitutional.) In the lead up to elections in 2000, the Government repeated its pattern in 1995 of arresting Muslim Brotherhood leaders, especially those who were candidates in the elections. Late in 1999, 16 Brothers, including leaders of several professional unions or associations, were arrested and put on military trial. Just one week before elections, the Government also arrested Brotherhood spokesman Mamoun al-Hudaybi's campaign organizers and poll representatives.¹³

Despite President Mubarak's and the NDP's political leverage and power, in the 2000 elections - the first to be supervised by Egypt's independent judiciary and thus free of the ballot tampering which characterized earlier elections - the scandal-plagued National Democratic Party faltered. Its dismal showing contrasted with the relatively strong performance of the Muslim Brotherhood. Despite government repression, the Muslim Brotherhood won 17 seats.

While the Government may claim to have tamed or controlled political Islam, Egyptian society itself has become more Islamized from below, at the grass roots, rather than from above. New Islamic trends or tendencies, diverse groups of religiously minded intellectuals, a number of whom have mass followings, reflect a broader phenomenon witnessed across Egyptian society. Young university educated professionals have become popular preachers to middle and upper class audiences. Men and women who function as physicians, journalists, lawyers, political scientists also write and speak out on issues of Islamic reform such as pluralism, women's rights, and social justice. Islamic belief, symbols, and values inform the government, courts, professions, dress and values of society (the modern as well as the traditional sectors) to a degree that defies the secular expectations of modernization theory and the wishes of the Mubarak government.

2.2.2. Iran: From Khomeini to Khatami

Distinguishing myths from realities has long been a problem when dealing with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Few observers of Iranian politics, whatever their political or ideological position, would have predicted the fundamental changes and conflicts that have occurred in the Islamic Republic. Among the most fundamental of issues have been the nature of the Islamic Republic, the role of religion and the *ulama* in the state, the democratization and civil society, pluralism, the rule of law, and the status of women. Within its clerical form of government, political discussion and debate over the nature of Iran's government has included a challenge to the conceptualization and authority of clerical guardianship or rule (the office of the Supreme Guide or *faqih*) during parliamentary and presidential elections in the late 1990s. Twenty years of mutual satanization (in particular between Iran and the United States) produced a climate in which both the hyperbole of Iran's ideologues and the animosity of its adversaries have obscured facts on the ground. Few observers today, however, would

¹³ Langohr, V., Cracks in Egypt's Electoral Engineering: The 2000 Vote, *MERIP Press Information Notes*, No. 39, 7 November 2000

dispute the fact that Iran - slowly under Hashmi Rafsanjani and more aggressively after the election of President Khatami - has been the scene of vibrant and heated public debate and discourse in the push for reform. Attempts by the ruling clergy to control personal and public space and suppress dissent in the name of Islam have been countered by the rise of a middle class that demands greater liberalization and reforms.¹⁴ Despite limitations, the Iranian Republic has institutionalized voting and elections - in particular, uninterrupted parliamentary elections, whose results have been relatively free of fraud and accepted by the ruling establishment. Electoral politics have witnessed the emergence of a more diverse and inclusive electorate and political elite whose voices and votes led to the turning point signaled by the election of Mohammad Khatami.

Perhaps no area signals the anomalies of Iranian politics more than the status and role of women in the Islamic republic. When the clergy came to power, few thought that women and women's rights would be a major issue in the Islamic Republic. Initial attempts to exclude women from public life instead resulted in the politicization of Iranian women. After two decades of struggle, resistance, and organization, women play a significant role in politics and society: "The symbolic use of women as instruments of state building has opened the way for women to make counterclaims on the state for further rights."¹⁵ The representation of women as culture bearers made them a primary symbol in the search for authenticity and cultural revival in the period of revolutionary state building. A state that has used women to foster its conservative or anti-liberal agenda has, however, often yielded to, even at times taken credit for, the broadening of women's political, social, and economic participation.

At the dawn of its third decade, the Islamic Republic of Iran is locked in a struggle to redefine Iran's political and economic future at home and abroad. Despite its accomplishments, major obstacles domestically and internationally remain. Critical to understanding the politics of the Islamic Republic has been and continues to be its factionalism and shifts of power. No better example of the factionalism and fragility of Iranian politics can be found than the parliamentary elections of February 2000 and their aftermath. An electoral turnout of more than 70 per cent and the victory of pro-Khatami progressive candidates who gained a plurality of seats in parliament (approximately 150 of 290 seats) seemed a signal of Iran's movement towards a modern democracy. However, in the months that followed, conservative forces flexed their political muscle. The Council of Guardians quietly nullified 11 national constituencies and the judiciary closed down more than 30 reformist newspapers and journals. President Khatami has not been able to translate his reformist vision of a civil society into reality; he has often seemed to be more an intellectual than a politician. Many of his key supporters in government have resigned or been imprisoned. Conservatives still control the major institutions of power - the Supreme Guide, the Council of Guardians, the judiciary, and armed forces. Reformers have failed to limit the powers of the Supreme Guide; in fact Ayatollah Khamenei has

¹⁴ For divergent but overlapping analyses, see Banuazizi, A., *Faltering Legitimacy: The Ruling Clerics and Civil Society in Contemporary Iran*, *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1995, pp. 563-78 and Milani, M.M., *Political Participation in Revolutionary Iran* in Esposito, J.L. (ed.) *Political Islam ...*, pp. 77-94

¹⁵ Farhi, F., *On the Reconfiguration of the Public Sphere* in Esposito, J.L. and Ramazani, R.K. (eds.), *Iran at the Crossroads*, New York: Palgrave, 2001, p. 65

expanded his powers to include parliamentary affairs and the once independent seminaries.

His ability to force President Khatami to dismiss a close ally, Atalooah Mohajerani, the Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance, who had been a symbol of the new freedoms and an advocate of democratization, civil society and closer ties with the West has underscored President Khatami's lack of power and made him look even more like a figurehead. Thus, the significance and future impact of President Khatami's quiet revolution, the future direction of Iran, and its posture in international politics remain difficult to fully assess or predict.

2.2.3. Turkey: Secularism, Islam and the Turkish State

For years, Turkey provided the only secular paradigm in the Muslim world, believed to be immune from any serious impact of political Islam. Many advocated the promotion of Turkey's "Muslim secularism" as an antidote to the Islamic "fundamentalist" influences of Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Pakistan in Central Asia. By 1996 the myth was shattered. Secular Turkey had its first Islamist prime minister, Necmettin Erbakan, leader of the Welfare Party, and its main cities had elected Islamist mayors in more than 28 cities. Welfare and the Virtue Party, its successor, constitute the strongest, though not the only, Islamic movement in Turkey today.

In contrast to other modern Muslim nation states, Turkey was created as a secular state. Secularism was imposed from above by Mustafa Kamal (Ataturk) and by an urban-based minority ruling elite. However, by the 1980s, rapid industrialization, international economic development, social dislocation and left-wing politics contributed to the politicization of Islam and the emergence of its most potent Islamic movement. Established by Necmettin Erbakan, an engineer trained in Germany, Welfare or Prosperity Party (WP, Refah Partisi), a grass roots party with more than four million members in major cities and provinces, represented a cross section of society, professionals and labourers, faculty and students, corporate leaders and factory workers, men and women with progressive and conservative Islamic orientations.¹⁶ The majority were graduates of state secular schools, trained in the sciences, technology and western thought.

The Welfare Party profited from the failures of the state, the internecine battles of Turkey's political leadership, and the WP's dedicated membership. WP members proved to be effective change agents, responsive to the socioeconomic needs of the urban poor.¹⁷ WP's holistic understanding of Islam resulted in a critique of Turkish politics and society whose message was as much about government corruption, economic development, schools, poverty, jobs, housing and the environment as about religious belief and practice. Welfare created a dynamic system of social welfare and patronage, assisting urban immigrants from small towns or rural areas in finding jobs, food, apartments, medical care, and educational opportunities.¹⁸

¹⁶ For a fuller discussion, see Yavuz, M.H., Political Islam and the Welfare Party in Turkey, *Journal of Comparative Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 1, October 1997, pp. 63-82

¹⁷ White, J., Islam and Democracy: The Turkish Experience, *Current History*, Vol. 94, No. 588, January 1995, p. 10

¹⁸ Yavuz, M.H., Turkey's 'Imagined Enemies': Kurds and Islamists, *The World Today*, Vol. 52, No. 2, April 1996, pp. 99-101

Ideologically, Welfare members ranged from those who sought a greater space for Islam within Turkey's secular state to those who ultimately desired an Islamic state. The religious conservatism of some was matched by the progressive technocrat mentality and reformism of many others. While most sought accommodation, others engaged in confrontation. Necmettin Erbakan combined the rhetoric of anti-imperialism and of traditional Islam, criticized western capitalism and the influence of international Zionism, and called for regional Muslim cooperation assuming a strong nationalist and anti-NATO and anti-Zionist posture. Welfare used democracy as a yardstick by which to judge the failure of Turkish secularism to be truly pluralistic, maintaining that true secularism (separation of religion from the state) should not only mean state autonomy but religious autonomy.

By 1994, Welfare had emerged as the leading political party in municipal elections, winning 24.1 per cent of the vote, scoring especially well in working class areas, and electing mayors in 28 municipalities including Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey's capital city. The vote was as much, if not more, about politics and economics (double and triple-digit inflation, urban poverty, inadequate social services and health care, pollution, congestion, high employment, inadequate housing, crime, corruption) as about religion. As in Algeria, a survey found that the WP attracted disaffected voters, only one-third of the WP's voters voted primarily because it was an Islamic party.¹⁹

Welfare mayors in many municipalities such as Istanbul and Ankara proved effective administrators.²⁰ The combined track records of many Welfare municipal governments and of social welfare programs in neighborhoods brought effective social change and made for a formidable force in electoral politics. At the same time, its encouragement of private enterprise and economic liberalization drew support from small businessmen who resented the state's continued ownership of as much as 60 per cent of the financial and manufacturing sector, its failure to curb the powers of big industrialists, and its dependence on European imports.

On 24 December 1995, Welfare won 21 per cent of the vote, tripling its performance in 1987, and gained 150 seats in parliament, attracting more votes than any other party, finally to come to power in coalition with former Prime Minister Tansu Ciller's secular, right-wing True Path Party. Many secular Turks and many in the West warned of another Iran, Sudan or Afghanistan. The most secular of Muslim states had its first Islamist prime minister.

Welfare encouraged the expanded role of religion in society: increasing the number of schools, religious foundations, businesses, banks, and social services. However, both secular Muslims and religious minorities such as Turkey's Alevi Muslim minority (perhaps 20 per cent of its 98 per cent Muslim population), despite the public assurances of Welfare, were sceptical about the WP's commitment to pluralism. Opponents saw little distinction between Welfare and violent groups of religious extremists who struck in the 1990s. Members of the secular elite like Ugur Mumcu, an outspoken advocate of secularism and critic of Islamists, were assassinated.

¹⁹ Heper, M., Islam and Democracy in Turkey: Towards a Reconciliation, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 1, Winter 1997, p. 35

²⁰ Yavuz, M.H., Turkey's 'Imagined Enemies' ..., p. 100

In July 1993, Islamic extremists set fire to a hotel, killing 37 participants at a conference of liberal secular writers, journalists and intellectuals.

In power, Necmettin Erbakan and the WP proved more pragmatic than some had expected. Despite his long time anti-Western, anti-Zionist rhetoric, his threat to pull out of NATO and to wage a *jihad* for Jerusalem, Erbakan did not pull Turkey out of NATO and did turn to the IMF for assistance in addressing Turkey's economic problems. He declared his friendship for America and Europe and described Welfare as "the guarantor of secular rule".²¹ He also honored Turkey's agreements with Israel on military and economic relations.

Turkey's military, with its long history of influence and intervention in domestic politics, proved to be the biggest obstacle and deciding political factor. Staunch secularists, some might say militant secularists, they have consistently espoused the role of defenders of Kemalism (Turkish secularism) and have had reacted strongly to any form of religion in public life, from female students' right to wear a headscarf (*hejab*) to Islamist politics. In Spring 1997, the military presented the Erbakan government with a set of 18 demands, designed to stem an Islamist threat to the secular state. These included restrictions on the wearing of Islamic dress, measures to prevent Islamists from entering the military or government administration, and a mandate that religious schools be closed because of their anti-secular bias. At the same time, the military demanded that compulsory secular education be increased from five to eight years. In April, General Cevik Bir publicly declared that the military's top priority, greater than that of its 10 year battle with Kurdish separatism, was the struggle against anti-secular Islamists.²²

Necmettin Erbakan and the Welfare Party's brief government proved to be a lightning rod for militant secularists (much of the military, civil service, and intelligentsia), whose secularism was not simply based on a belief in the separation of religion and the state but on an anti-religious secular ideology/belief system, as rigid and militant as it claimed "Islamic fundamentalism" was. As in Algeria, the secularist establishment was willing to compromise Turkey's commitment to democracy to prevent Islamists from participating in politics and society even though as Metin Heper observed: "A marriage between Islam and democracy in Turkey can be consummated if the radical secularists stop trying to impose their preferred life-style and set of values upon the Islamists, and if the latter do not attempt to undermine by word or deed the basic tenets of the secular democratic state in Turkey."²³

Finally, no confidence votes in parliament, a petition by Turkey's chief prosecutor to ban Welfare for violating the Turkish constitution's articles on secularism and pushing the country towards civil war, and military conducted briefings for judges, attorneys and the media on the Islamist threat to the Turkish state led to the collapse of the Erbakan-Ciller coalition and Necmettin Erbakan's resignation on 18 June 1997.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30

²² Couturier, K., Anti-Secularism Eclipses Insurgency as Army's No. 1 Concern, *The Washington Post*, 5 April 1997

²³ Heper, p. 45

On 28 February 1998, Turkey's Constitutional Court issued a court order that banned Welfare. Necmettin Erbakan was expelled from Parliament and barred from participation in the political process for five years. Welfare's assets were seized. He and a number of other leaders were tried for sedition.

In 1998, former Welfare Party members and supporters regrouped and formed the Virtue (Fazilet) Party (VP or FP), the unofficial successor of Welfare. It softened its Islamic profile, emphasizing instead that it was a political party that respected Turkey's Islamic traditions and culture. This change was symbolized by the naming of three women (two who do not wear *hejab* and are not known to be Islamist) to Virtue's executive board. Abdullah Gul, who had served as State Minister in the Welfare government, signaled the new party's departure from Welfare's foreign policy, stating that the Virtue Party favored full integration with the West to assure democracy and civilian rule. Although Virtue fared well in municipal elections, in the April 1999 parliamentary elections, the VP lost ground and came in third:

The electorate found the FP to be successful in providing running water, collecting the garbage and providing services, and consequently kept them in control of regional administrations, however, it did not hesitate to reflect in the ballot boxes that they were not satisfied with their politics in state affairs.²⁴

The aftermath of the elections demonstrated the persisting struggle between Turkish state secularism and Islamic movements. An elected deputy from the VP aroused the ire of the secular members of parliament at the parliament's swearing-in session wearing a headscarf. She was forced to leave, prevented from taking her oath as secular deputies pounded their desks and shouted "Out!" Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit announced that he would seek to implement a strict dress code. Prosecutors sought to try her for inciting religious hatred and President Suleyman Demirel initiated a move to strip her of her citizenship because she had dual citizenship (she had studied in America and her first husband had been an American).²⁵

The Government's fear of Islam seemed vividly demonstrated when, in August 2000, it indicted in absentia Fetullah Gulen, 62, a prominent Islamic leader who was friendly with senior politicians and religious leaders, for plotting to overthrow Turkey's secular government. Gulen is the spiritual leader of an Islamic community or organization,²⁶ that operates hundreds of schools in Turkey, Central Asia, the Balkans, Europe and America and runs a television channel, a radio station, an advertising agency, a daily newspaper and a bank. He had for many years been a critic of Welfare and political Islam and "an unofficial ambassador for Turkey who promoted a moderate brand of Islam. He preached tolerance, meeting with Pope John Paul II and other religious and political leaders, among them Turkey's prime ministers and presidents."²⁷ Faced with national and international reaction, the Government abruptly withdrew the indictment.

²⁴ Koru, F., The Day After: An Assessment, *Turkish Daily News*, 20 April 1999

²⁵ Merve Kavacki in the Hot Seat, *Turkish Probe*, 16 May 1999

²⁶ Turkish Court Voids Warrant for Islamic Leader, *The New York Times*, 29 August 2000

²⁷ Frantz, D., Turkey Assails a Revered Islamic Moderate, *The New York Times*, 25 August 2000

During the same time that the Government had moved against Gulen, Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit attempted to obtain a government decree that would enable him to dismiss thousands of civil servants suspected of ties to pro-Islamic or separatist groups. Turkey's President, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, twice refused to sign the measure into law.

2.3. Islam in the Gulf: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States

Islamist groups in the Gulf, as in other parts of the Muslim world, are largely composed of university students and graduates. Because in the Gulf, in contrast to many other parts of the Arab and Muslim world, professional and trade associations are banned, the degree of Islamist presence in the professions is sometimes not as apparent. While Islamic movements react primarily to domestic political issues in their respective nations, in the post-Gulf war period, in addition to issues like Palestine and the impact of sanctions on the Iraqi people, foreign (especially American) military presence has become a major issue. One of the realities often overlooked or downplayed is the extent to which Islamist opposition and criticism of excessive dependence on the West (the US in particular) comes from those who have had the greatest exposure to the West. Moreover, this Islamic opposition often reflects concerns of other (non-Islamist) sectors of society.

Many rulers in the Gulf, like those in other parts of the Arab world, increasingly experience Islamists as their most effective critics who identify, and may exploit, real problems and tensions. They are therefore a political challenge or direct threat to be controlled, co-opted or crushed. Kuwait and Yemen in the Gulf represent an attempt to co-opt and contain; Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have taken more aggressive, repressive approaches. Moreover, increasingly, like Egypt and Turkey, some governments in the Gulf self-servingly blur the line between violent extremists and moderates who participate within the system. As a result, Islamist organizations are regarded as a threat, regardless of whether evidence exists that they are violent extremists.

Western governments with a high visibility, especially military presence, and track record of support for authoritarian and repressive regimes reinforce the image of an imperial West whose primary goal is the presence of its military in the Gulf and access to oil resources, actions which Islamists believe will foster dependence and undermine faith and culture. Muslim allies of Western countries are seen as increasingly dependent on the West for military protection and for arms purchases that enable them to control their domestic opposition as much as defend themselves against external aggression. Thus, opponents charge that ruling families are compliant puppets of the West, more concerned with preserving power and wealth than with the future of their countries and societies.

The Gulf states, like much of the Muslim world, will continue to experience the impact of political Islam and to contend with Islamic organizations at home and abroad. For most regimes, their relative wealth, size, established alliances and security forces will continue to assure stability in the short term. For many years, the ability of the GCC states to use petrodollars to support Islamist organizations bought quiescence if not acquiescence. The Gulf War has dramatically changed this situation. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in particular have cut off support to erstwhile friends. At the same

time, many Islamist movements have been freer with their criticisms of the “un-Islamic” character of monarchies, charging corruption and condemning the lavish and profligate lifestyles of royal families and elites, the weakness and vulnerability of states, their dependence on the West for protection and security, and their support of the western-brokered Palestinian Peace Accords. The more states choke off the supply of funds not only from government but also from the private sector, the greater the risk of Islamist opposition.

In contrast to many other states in the Arab world, Gulf rulers have tended to self-consciously use Islam as a source of self-legitimation. Whatever its advantages in the past, in a climate of greater religious awareness or awakening and more limited economic resources, GCC states today will increasingly be challenged to demonstrate their Islamic credentials, their ability to provide reinterpretation (*ijtihad*) of Islam in a manner that supports development and pluralism. In contrast to other areas of the Arab and Muslim world, given the demographics, pluralism in the Gulf will have more to do with Sunni-Shi'a rather than Muslim-Christian relations. Although greater political liberalization will initially appear to be a threat to the traditional authority of established regimes, the strengthening of civil society will prove important to those who wish to lessen the threat of religious (or secular) extremism in a world in which greater political participation and accountability have increasingly become the litmus test for legitimacy. The alternative is the perpetuation of weak or non-existent civil societies and a future in which many governments and opposition, religious and secular populist movements alike, will resort to and perpetuate authoritarian rule, contributing to long-term instability.

2.4. Pakistan and Afghanistan

Pakistan in the eyes of some has moved precipitously from being regarded as a stable ally to a training ground for terrorists. One of the side effects of Pakistan's greater Islamization of state and society under General Zia ul-Haq (1977-1988) was the exacerbation of religious sectarianism.²⁸ Pakistan has had a number of Islamic movements that have functioned as religiously based political parties, the Jamaat-i-Islami, Jamiyat Ulama-i-Islam, Jamiyat Ulama-i-Pakistan and Tahrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh-e-Jafariya. All functioned within the political system though often as opposition groups. Although anti-Shia sentiment, hatred and violence had existed, the 1990s saw a dramatic upsurge of religious radicalism and Sunni-Shi'i sectarian conflict in the Punjab, Karachi and elsewhere.

The legalistic approach of Zia's Islamization program which emphasized enforcement of the *shar'ia* rather than Islamic principles of freedom, equality, and social justice, fed conflicts over whose interpretation of Islamic law would become the basis for public policy. It sharpened the sectarian differences and tensions between its Sunni majority and a Shi'i minority (15 per cent), more emboldened by the impact of the Iranian revolution.

²⁸ For aspects of Zia ul-Haq's Islamization program, see Weiss, A.M. (ed.) *Islamic Reassertion in Pakistan: The Application of Islamic Laws in a Modern State*, Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987; Esposito, J.L., *Islam and Politics*, pp. 171-196

Militant Sunni organizations like the Sipah-i-Sahab (Soldiers of the Companions of the Prophet) and Lashkar-e-Tayba and equally militant Shi'i like the Sipah-i-Muhammad (Soldiers of Muhammad) and Imamiya Students' Organization, armed with automatic weapons and explosives, engaged in a level of sectarian brutality and violence that assumed alarming proportions. Funding has come from urban middle class Sunni and Shi'i businessmen as well as from foreign countries, especially Saudi Arabia and Iran who have fought a proxy war for influence in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia.²⁹ However, Sunni-Shi'i identity politics and conflict have often been as much about political empowerment and economic conditions as foreign intervention.

Although Sunni militant forces had been primarily focused on domestic sectarian religious, political and economic issues, more recently, they have also turned to international issues. Thus, they directly threatened American interests if it were to pursue Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. This new brand of Sunni militancy, in whose creation US and its regional allies have had a hand due to their Afghan policy, is rapidly replacing Shi'ism in shaping radical Islamist politics. The complexity of this issue is reflected in the manner in which Sunni militancy has become entwined with Pakistan's regional and domestic politics. Pakistan's military, like many of Pakistan's madrasas, has had close ties with the Taliban and with militant Pakistani groups. The military since Zia ul-Haq's regime has become more Islamized both in its training and as a result of its support for the *mujahideen* in the Soviet-Afghan war. Pakistan and Afghanistan have also supported the *mujahideen* in Kashmir in their struggle against India. In the summer of 1999, the Pakistan military used Sunni militant forces as a cover for incursion into the Kargil region of Kashmir. The same militant forces that were involved in Kargil were used by General Pervez Musharraf, who masterminded Kargil, to precipitate a law and order crisis in Pakistan in order to undermine the democratically elected government of Sharif. In the ten days leading to the military coup of October 1999, some 45 Shi'i religious and communal leaders were assassinated across Pakistan by Sunni sectarian gangs that included fighters from Kashmir. The export of radical Afghan-style *ji-had*-Islam to South and Central Asia, which has come to be called Talibanization, feeds off political fragmentation and economic failures as well as religious and ethnic differences and conflicts.

In contrast to fear of the Islamic resurgence or "Islamic fundamentalism" throughout the 1980s, Afghanistan's *mujahideen* were seen as freedom fighters whose *ji-had* (holy war) received substantial aid from America, Saudi Arabia and other countries. However, the *mujahideen* victory did not bring peace. The common Islamic identity which had served to inspire, mobilize and unify the *mujahideen* in their *ji-had* against the Soviet Union was eclipsed by Afghanistan's age old tribal, ethnic and religious (Sunni-Shi'i) differences and rivalries. But after almost 18 years of civil war, a seemingly endless state of carnage and chaos was abruptly reversed.

²⁹ Ahmad, M., Revivalism, Islamization, Sectarianism and Violence in Pakistan (unpublished paper), p.

A new militia, a band of madrasa students (*taliban*), first appeared in late 1994 and subsequently swept across Afghanistan, uniting 90 per cent of the country under its rule and creating the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Portrayed as young students from the madrasas with no military background, in fact they were a force of mullahs and *taliban*, religious leaders and students. The former comprised veterans of the Afghan-Soviet war who had returned to the madrasas after the departure of the Soviets.

Although initially hailed as liberators who secured towns, made the streets safe for ordinary citizens, and cleaned up corruption and graft, their strict interpretation of Islam and their policies have brought criticism from the Muslim world and the West. With Saudi and Pakistani patrons, the Taliban's Wahhabi-like doctrines are close to those of Saudi Arabia's religious establishment and Pakistan's Jamaat-i-Islami though more extreme. The predominantly Pushtun Taliban have imposed their own form of tribal Islam, using religion to legitimate holy war to subdue other ethnic and religious Muslim groups. Their intolerance of any "deviation" from their brand of Islam has led to the slaughter of many of Afghanistan's Shi'i minority, whom they disdain as heretics, in areas like Mazda al-Sharif and Bamiyan. They have banned women from school and the workplace, required that men wear beards and women chador, banned music and television, and imposed strict physical punishments on deviators. Many Muslim religious leaders have denounced Taliban "Islamic" policies as aberrant. Muslim governments as diverse as Iran and Egypt, as well as Western governments and international human rights organizations, have condemned Taliban violations of human rights. Neither the United Nations nor most of the global community acknowledge their legitimacy (the Taliban government is recognized by only four nations).

The Taliban brand of Islamic radicalism has been significantly informed and influenced by its links to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The result is a neo-Deobandi ideology, a *jihad* culture of Islamic radicalism and revolution. Although the Sunni Deobandi school was historically reformist, its political expression and transformation in Pakistan's Jamiyyat i-Ulama-i-Islam (JUI) has produced a rigid militant, anti-American and anti-non-Muslim ideology. Many of the Taliban were trained in hundreds of JUI run madrasas set up in the Pushtun-dominated areas of the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan in Pakistan for Afghan refugees, often run by semi-literate mullahs. Many were supported by Saudi funding and with it the influence of an ultra conservative Wahhabi Islam. There they received religious, ideological and military training. The Taliban show little knowledge or appreciation of their Islamic tradition or of currents of Islamic thought in the broader Muslim world today. They espouse a myopic, self-contained militant worldview. The classical Islamic belief in *jihad* as a defense of Islam and the Muslim community against aggression has been transformed into a militant *jihad* culture and worldview that targets Muslims and non-Muslims alike: "*Jihad* is not just about fighting against oppression and occupation. *Jihad* is about the way you think and say prayers, the way you eat and sleep. It's about creating an Islamic environment. It's about the struggle of life."³⁰

³⁰ Wright, R., The Chilling Goal of Islam's New Warriors, *The Los Angeles Times*, 28 December, 2000

The Taliban when they came to power turned over many of their training camps to JUI factions who have trained thousands of Pakistani and Arab militants who have fought with the Taliban.³¹ Taliban camps continue to train fighters from South and Central Asia and the Arab world in their radical *jihad* ideology and tactics. Equally troublesome has been their link to and support for Osama bin Laden, the Saudi born millionaire and veteran of the Afghan-Soviet war, and his export of global terrorism discussed below.

3. Islamic Threat or Clash of Civilizations

3.1. Militias and Extremist Organizations: Resistance Movements or Terrorist Organizations?

Militias have played a significant role in Muslim politics in many countries. While some have been associated with underground or clandestine organizations that seek through violence to topple governments, others are organizations or militia wings of organizations that function within their societies. The Armed Islamic Group (Groupe Islamique Armée - GIA) in Algeria, the Gamaa Islamiyya and Islamic Jihad in Egypt are clear examples of violent revolutionaries. Hizbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Israel/Palestine today both function in mainstream society as major providers of educational and social services and also engage in armed struggle. The Taliban are a militia that has fought its way to rule in Afghanistan. The creation, existence and histories of these organizations reflect their complexity and the issues their existence and track records raise. To what extent are extremist organizations the product of political repression? As destructive and barbaric as the track-record of the GIA has been, would the GIA vengeance and retaliation have occurred (as well as that of the extremists in the military and security forces) if the results of Algeria's free elections had been respected and the FIS had been allowed to assume the positions to which they were elected? To what extent are Hizbollah and Hamas resistance movements, whose excesses though inexcusable are the result of an oppressive and violent political context?

3.1.1. Hizbollah

Hizbollah emerged in response to Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and subsequent occupation of southern Lebanon with its creation of a "security zone". Though Iranian inspired and supported for many years, Hizbollah's primary role has been that of an Islamic/Lebanese resistance movement. Since the signing of the Taif accord in 1989, Hizbollah has transformed itself, preparing for life after resistance and the end of Israeli occupation, which occurred in May 2000. Toward that end, Hizbollah participated in mainstream Lebanese politics and parliamentary elections in the north. At the same time, it garnered popular support by continuing to fight against Israeli occupation of Lebanon (its "security zone") in the south, arguing that it was an army of resistance and liberation.

³¹ Rashid, A., The Taliban: Exporting Extremism, *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 1999 and *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000; Ahmed, K., The Grand Deobandi Consensus, *The Friday Times (Pakistan): Opinion*, Vol. 11, No. 49, 4-10 February 2000

Hizbollah demonstrates the extent to which the ideology, agenda and tactics/methods of Islamic movements are often the product of their sociopolitical environments. Political inclusion rather than exclusion or repression has led to pragmatism, compromise and coalition building. Hizbollah participates in a multiconfessional state in which 40 per cent of the population is Shi'i, AMAL is the stronger Shi'i party, and Hizbollah has controlled less than 10 percent of the seats in parliament. It has learned to compromise and has impressed many, including political adversaries, with its professionalism. As Richard Norton has noted:

Lebanese parliamentarians, including senior Maronites, a former Sunni prime minister, and highly respected Armenian deputies have noted in private interviews (in 1995 and 1996) that the Hizbollah deputies have behaved responsibly and cooperatively. They have often built political alliances in the parliament on pragmatic grounds, while they are also among the most outspoken members of the dwindling political opposition. In the latter sense, their positions have sometimes directly challenged those favored by Syria. In the view of a number of parliamentarians and many other Lebanese insiders with whom I have spoken, this experiment in political inclusion is working, and Hizbollah is being gradually absorbed by the political system.³²

Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, is the product of Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in violation of UN resolutions that these territories seized in the 1967 war be returned. Hamas is a religious, social, political, and military movement. While its leadership has included religious officials (imams), the majority are professionals and technocrats trained in medicine, engineering, science, and business. The combination of political and social activism with guerrilla warfare has won financial and moral support from many Palestinians and sympathetic supporters in the broader Arab and Muslim world.

Hamas like Hizbollah has strengthened its base of popular support by looking after the needs of their members and local citizens. A primary reason for its popularity and following has been its extensive network of community and charitable projects and programs: kindergartens, schools, scholarships, support for students studying abroad, libraries, social and sports clubs, and other social welfare services. Amidst the poverty and camps of the occupied territories, Hamas network of services has provided desperately needed services and earned it respect and admiration:

Hamas runs the best social services network in the Gaza strip Structured and well organized, Hamas is trusted by the poor (Gaza's overwhelming majority) to deliver on its promises, and is perceived to be far less corrupt and subject to patronage than its secular nationalist counterparts, especially Fateh Some senior officials in UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency] in Gaza acknowledged that Hamas is the only faction they trust to distribute UNRWA food donations to the people.³³

³² Norton, A.R., Hizballah: From Radicalism to Pragmatism?, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 5, January 1998, p. 156

³³ Roy, S.M., Gaza: New Dynamics of Civic Disintegration, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 4, Summer 1993, p. 25

However, it is the actions of the Qassem Brigade, Hamas military wing, not its social activism that has earned its reputation for terrorism. Created in 1991, the Brigade initially engaged in well-planned selective attacks against Israeli military and police. Organized into small clandestine cells, it used guerrilla warfare, not random acts of violence, to respond to Israeli policies and actions. Answering to charges that it is a terrorist organization (a claim made by Israel, the United States, and others), Hamas has defended acts of violence as legitimate self-defense and retaliation in a struggle against Israeli occupation and repression.

Although Hamas' attacks were initially restricted to military targets in the occupied territories, that position changed dramatically after the Oslo Accords in 1993. Responding to specific events in Israel and the West Bank and Gaza, the Qassim Brigade undertook direct attacks outside the heart of Israel against civilian as well as military targets. In particular, it adopted a new type of warfare, that of suicide bombers. Its deadly attacks increased exponentially after a Jewish settler (Baruch Goldstein) killed 29 worshippers during the Friday congregational (*juma*) prayer at the Mosque of the Patriarch on Hebron on 25 February 1994. The Brigade promised swift revenge and retaliation for the "massacre" and undertook five anti-Israeli operations within Israel itself in cities like Galilee, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. The most deadly occurred on 19 October 1994 in the heart of Tel Aviv with the bombing of a bus that killed 23 and injured nearly 50 people. Peace negotiations were again disrupted in July 1997 when suicide bombers killed 13 and wounded more than 150 in a Jerusalem market. The use of violence against civilians also brought to the surface deep cleavages within Hamas. If some of its leaders claimed that they were not able to control some members of the Brigade, its critics rejected this distinction between its political and military wings as duplicitous.

Hamas opposition to Arafat and the Oslo Peace Accords and call to continue to wage the Palestinian struggle against Israel has put it at odds with both the PNA (the Palestinian National Authority) and Israel. Israeli governments of Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak have focused on terrorism and Hamas as the chief obstacle to peace. Its continued attacks against civilian targets or assassination attempts have occurred in a context in which Israel or Israeli citizens have committed similar actions, from the massacre of Muslims at prayer in the Hebron mosque to the Israeli military's disproportionate use of force in the first and second intifadas.

Finally, it is important here to note that many, if not most, Islamic organizations and NGOs are non-political and non-violent. Thus, in the West Bank and Gaza, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been the beneficiaries of services provided by Islamic social and economic institutions. Islamic associations have provided support for between 7,000 and 10,000 orphans, spending at times US\$ 3 to 4 million annually for clothes, food, school supplies as well as services for approximately 5,000 families.³⁴

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29

3.1.2. *Osama bin Laden and Global Terrorism*

The suicide bombing attack of 12 October 2000 against the USS Cole, with its loss of 17 American sailors and the identification of the Afghan-based Saudi (his citizenship has been revoked) multimillionaire Osama bin Laden, the seemingly devout, well-educated, wealthy son of a prominent Saudi family, as a prime suspect, was a grim reminder of Osama bin Laden's reputation as a godfather of global terrorism for his support for radical groups and militias.³⁵ He has been linked to a series of attacks, many in his self-declared *jihād* against the United States. The most spectacular and deadly to date is the truck bombing of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on 7 August 1998 that killed 263 people and injured more than 5,000. Once more the international community witnessed the extremist fringe of political Islam. *The Washington Post* headline reflected the fears of many: "A Global, Pan-Islamic Network: Terrorism Entrepreneur Unifies Groups Financially, Politically". On 27 August the United States in retaliation launched a pre-emptive strike against Osama bin Laden and the threat of global terrorism, attacking alleged terrorist militia training sites associated with Osama bin Laden in Sudan and Afghanistan. The US response signaled a new phase of the war against terrorism that now focused on a specific individual accused of supporting an international network of terrorist organizations. Osama bin Laden, like Hamas and Hizbollah, has had his admirers as well as his detractors. For some, he represents a true *mujahid*, freedom fighter; for many others a menace that supports a network of international terrorists.

Osama bin Laden fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan, a struggle that allied him with a cause supported by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and many others. He soon became a focal point for many of the "Arab Afghans", those from the Arab world who had also joined the *jihād*. After the war, he returned to Saudi Arabia. However, his militant objections to the Gulf War of 1991 and the American military presence in Saudi Arabia, put him on a collision course with his government. He bitterly criticized the House of Saud for permitting foreign non-Muslim military presence in the homeland of Islam's two most sacred sites, Mecca and Medina. Stripped of his Saudi citizenship, he moved to Sudan in 1994 where he became more active in Islamist causes in the broader Muslim world. In 1996 Sudan asked him to leave in response to American charges that he used Sudan as a base for his involvement in international terrorism. It was then that he returned to Afghanistan.

Osama bin Laden is regarded as a major founder of terrorist groups, suspected of funding groups involved in the bombing of the World Trade Center, a fire in Somalia in 1993 that left 18 Americans dead, bombings in Riyadh in 1995 and of the Khobar Towers in Dhahran in 1996 (both of which he denies), the killing of 58 tourists at Luxor, Egypt in 1997 as well as the bombings in Tanzania and Kenya. He has admitted his complicity in the attacks in Somalia, expressed his admiration (though denying his involvement, he called them "heroes") for the bombings in Riyadh and Dhahran, threatened attacks against Americans who remain on Saudi soil, and promised retaliation internationally for cruise missile attacks.³⁶

³⁵ For perceptive discussions of Osama bin Laden, see Rashid, A., *Taliban: Militant Islam ...* and Cooley, J.K., *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*, London: Pluto Press, 2000

³⁶ Transcript of Osama bin Laden Interview, CNN/Time, *Impact: Holy Terror?* 25 August 1998

In February 1998, he announced the creation of a transnational coalition of extremist groups, The Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders.

Osama bin Laden's message and its causes resonate with the feelings of many in the Arab and Muslim world. A sharp critic of American foreign policy towards the Muslim world, he denounces its support for Israel, which he believes is responsible for the failure of the Peace Process, its refusal to condemn the Israeli shelling of civilians in Qana, Lebanon in 1996, and US insistence on continued sanctions against Iraq which have resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians, especially children. He is equally critical of what he dismisses as the "new crusades" in the Gulf, in particular the substantial American (military and economic) presence and involvement in Saudi Arabia. To these are added other populist causes like Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, and Kashmir.

Focusing on Osama bin Laden risks catapulting one of many sources of terrorism to centre stage, distorting both the diverse international sources (state and non-state, non-Muslim and Muslim) of terrorism as well as the significance of a single individual. It has turned America and Europe's stated defense of democracy and crusade against global terrorism into an incident that has transformed Osama bin Laden from a mastermind of terrorism into a cult hero in many parts of the Muslim world. More importantly, overreaction to Osama bin Laden can lead to abortive acts of retaliation that can backfire in terms of their intent such as the American missile attack in Sudan. Members of the international community, including European diplomats and businessmen with direct contact with the Al-Shifa plant, denied the US claims that this pharmaceutical factory was actually manufacturing chemical weapons. The American administration finally reluctantly admitted that there was no evidence directly linking Osama bin Laden to the Al-Shifa factory in Khartoum or that it manufactured anything but pharmaceuticals (rather than its being a "secret chemical weapons factory" as originally charged).

Given Osama bin Laden's championing of popular causes, the need to provide hard evidence in establishing the connection between him and acts of terrorism is important. While such evidence would not necessarily discredit him in the eyes of fellow extremists, it would destroy his credibility more broadly in the Muslim world and among some in Muslim communities in the West as well as provide the grounds for more aggressive policies to capture him or destroy his network and training camps. Without it, the US places itself in the difficult position of engaging in a preemptive strike, violating international law and the borders of a sovereign nation. The US missile attack was taken without the cooperation of the international community, neither the United Nations nor its European allies. Without providing evidence for its actions, the US became vulnerable to accusations of superpower arrogance, or worse of state terrorism or of operating as a rogue state.

Violence, revolution and terrorism are particularly contentious and difficult issues. While Osama bin Laden's acts of violence and terrorism (and the acts of those with whom he is associated or for whom he has expressed admiration) present a clear example of an extremist threat, many others do not. Distinguishing between the legitimate and illegitimate use of force, moderates and extremists, populist movements and terrorists can be difficult. The illegitimate use of violence, distinguishing between moderates and extremists, between aggression and

self-defense, resistance and terrorism often depends on where one stands. The line between movements of national liberation and terrorist organizations is often blurred or dependent upon one's political vantage-point. America's revolutionary heroes were rebels and terrorists to the British crown as were Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, the Irgun and Stern Gangs. Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress, and until recently, Yasser Arafat and the PLO were regarded by their opposition as terrorists leading terrorist movements. Yesterday's terrorists may be just that - terrorists, or they may become today's statesmen. Soldier "peacekeepers" in an Israeli "security zone" in southern Lebanon are "forces of occupation" in the eyes of many Lebanese and Arabs. What some regard as a war of resistance and national liberation by Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza is regarded by many Israelis as terrorism. While the British have regarded the IRA as terrorists, the American Government refused British requests to follow suit and ban financial support for the IRA by Americans. Is Christian liberation theology and its derivative movements in Latin and Central America simply a crypto-Marxist revolutionary force or an authentic populist religious movement? The complexity of the situation is compounded by the tendency in the international system to regard those in power as legitimate rulers or governments, regardless of how they came to power or whether or not they are autocratic and repressive. Government agents (police, military, security forces) use "legitimate" force, while armed opposition groups are often portrayed as extremists or guerrilla organizations who engage in violence and terrorism. The question "What is extremism?" or "What is terrorism?" remains complex and contentious. Often the conclusion depends upon where one stands.

3.2. Islamic Radicalism: The Importance of the Sectarian Dimension

Containment of Islamism has meant containing Shi'ism, since the Islamic threat was at the outset a Shi'i threat. Iran, under the reign of ayatollahs, for long posed the greatest single threat and continues to be singled out by Israel for its support of Hizbollah and Hamas. Prime Minister Peres called Tehran "the capital of terrorism" in Sharm al-Shaykh, when the group responsible for Tel Aviv bombings had an office in Damascus. Similarly, in Lebanon Hizbollah forced both the United States and Israel to withdraw, and now poses as the only effective and active Arab fighting force against Israel.

As a result, Shi'ism has been viewed as the most revolutionary and militant force in Islam. This contributed to America's lack of support for the Shi'is in Iraq after the Gulf war. As the Iraqi Republican Guards passed before American troops to quell the Shia uprising in southern Iraq in 1991, the United States remained unmoved by Shia pleas for help. Policy-making in Washington appeared to be captured by what some in the media called "the Shia's historical opposition to the United States". US and European silence - in government as well as media - regarding the repression of Shi'i opposition in Bahrain seems to be motivated by the same perspective.

Sunni Islamism has in effect been treated as the "lesser evil". In many instances, lacking Iran's hegemonic ambitions, Islamism has been primarily preoccupied with internal matters. Its ebbs and flows often appeared to be controlled by governments in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan or Malaysia. Even in the worst cases, it was no match for the *mukhabarat* (security) states in the Arab world. For similar reasons, the United States turned a blind eye to Saudi Arabia's significant investment in Sunni militancy,

designed to create a wall around Iran extending from Central Asia to the Persian Gulf. As Iran's revolution begins to show signs of exhaustion, and the country takes measured steps toward normalization of its domestic and international politics, the fruits of decades of investment in Sunni militancy now stand ready to take over where Iran is leaving off. The phenomenon of the Taliban, Harakatul Mujahedin in Kashmir, the Osama bin Laden and Ahmed Ramzi Yusuf network, and their fellow militants in many parts of the Muslim world represent a new phase in militancy that is highly sectarian in character. It is often rooted in a Sunni militancy that is anti-Shi'i and is gradually turning its attention toward the West.

This new brand of Sunni militancy, often referred to as the Afghan Arabs or Talibanization, in whose creation the US and its regional allies have had a hand, is rapidly replacing Shi'ism in shaping radical Islamist politics. As Sunni militancy surfaces in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Chechnya (where it is referred to as Wahhabism on account of its Saudi financial backing), Central Asia, and the Persian Gulf, the international community may face a new dynamic - a conflict between Shi'is and Sunnis (the opening phase of which occurred with the massacre of Shi'is in Mazar Sharif and Bamiyam by the Taliban and the military stand-off on the Iran-Afghanistan border).

3.3. Clash of Civilizations?

In recent years, there are those who speak of a clash of civilizations, a clash between Islam and modern secular (or Judeo-Christian), democratic values and culture or between Islamic civilization and the West. The great attention given to such a "clash" theory has resulted from the underestimation of religion in modernization or development theory as a source of identity and a potential force in politics (and its failure as a predictive paradigm) that has led today to its increasing overestimation. New recognition of the significance of religion in international affairs has reinforced an exaggerated belief among some in an impending civilizational clash. The clearest, most provocative and influential articulation of this position is Samuel P. Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" in which Huntington declared that in the post Cold War period: "The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future The next world war, if there is one, will be a war between civilizations."³⁷ Religious and cultural differences are emphasized in Huntington's position over similarities; political, economic, and cultural differences are necessarily equated with confrontation. Areas of cooperation and the fact that most countries are primarily, though not solely, driven by national and regional interests are overlooked or de-emphasized. Religious or civilizational differences or causes become facile explanations for conflicts that are actually rooted in political, economic and social inequities and injustices: authoritarianism, repression, corruption, failed economies and gross economic disparities between rich and poor. Like the "clash theory", the creation of an "imagined" monolithic Islam has led to a religious reductionism that views political conflicts in the Sudan, Lebanon, Bosnia, Kosovo, Nigeria, Indonesia, Azerbaijan, and Chechnya in primarily religious terms - as religious conflicts. Although the

³⁷ Huntington, S.P., *The Clash of Civilizations*, *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, p. 258; See also, Huntington, S.P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997; Pipes, D., *Fundamentalist Muslims*, *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1986, pp. 939-59; Lewis, B. *Islam and Liberal Democracy*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1993, pp 87-98

communities in these areas may be broadly identified in religious or confessional terms, as is the case of Northern Ireland's Catholic and Protestant communities or Sri Lanka's Tamil (Hindu) and Buddhist communities, local disputes and civil wars have more to do with political (ethnic nationalism and autonomy and independence) and socioeconomic issues/grievances than with religion.

The challenge in an increasingly global, interdependent world is to recognize both competing and common interests. American or European policy towards Japan or Saudi Arabia is not based upon a sense of shared culture, religion, or civilization but upon national or group interests. Cooperation can result from common religious and ethnic backgrounds; however, more often than not it comes from the recognition of common national and strategic interests. While a clash of civilizations can become the clarion call that justifies aggression and warfare, future global threats and wars will be due less to a clash of "civilizations" than a clash of interests, economic and otherwise.

3.4. Political Islam and the Democracy Debate

In recent years, the call for greater liberalization and democratization has become common and widespread throughout much of the region, as diverse sectors of society, secular and religious, leftist and rightist, educated and uneducated, increasingly use democratization as the litmus test by which to judge the legitimacy of governments and political movements alike. A diversity of voices, some harmonious and others strident, may be heard in the discussion and debate in recent years over political participation and democratization.³⁸ There are in fact a range of Muslim positions regarding democratization.³⁹ Secularists argue for secular forms of democracy, the separation of religion and the state. Rejectionists maintain that Islam has its own forms of governance and that it is incompatible with democracy. This position is held by moderates and militant Muslims, from King Fahd to radical Islamist organizations. Accommodationists believe that traditional concepts and institutions can be utilized to develop Islamically acceptable forms of popular political participation and/or democratization.

Despite this reality, there are those who have increasingly charged that the absence of democracy is due to peculiar characteristics of Arab and Muslim culture. Some maintain that Arab culture and/or Islam are incompatible with democracy. Others assert that the introduction of democracy is premature. Still others believe that democracy is a product of the western experience that may well be inappropriate or non-transferable to other cultures.

Several factors must be kept in mind when speaking of the compatibility or incompatibility of Islam and democracy. Those who argue a priori that Islam and democracy are incompatible must recall that the same could be said and indeed was

³⁸ For an analysis of this issue, see Esposito, J.L. and Voll, J.O., *Islam and Democracy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996; Lewis, B., *Islam and Liberal Democracy*; Kramer, M., *Islam vs. Democracy*, *Commentary*; January 1993, pp. 35-42; Voll, J.O. and Esposito, J.L., *Islam's Democratic Essence*, *Middle East Quarterly*, September 1994, pp. 3-11 with ripostes, pp. 12-19, and Voll and Esposito reply, *Middle East Quarterly*, December 1994, 71-72; Wright, R., *Islam, Democracy and the West*, *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1992, pp. 131-45

³⁹ Esposito, J.L. and Piscatori, J.P., *Democratization and Islam*, *The Middle East Journal*, Summer 1991, pp. 427-40

said by a variety of secular and religious intellectuals and leaders in the past about Judaism and Christianity. Both faiths were used in the past to support and legitimate non-democratic states and empires, from Biblical kingdoms and divine right monarchies to forms of dictatorship in which notions of modern pluralism and human rights were unknown. Yet both Judaism and Christianity like all of the world's religions have historically proved to be open to reformulation and change, as the sacred texts and beliefs of the religious tradition are adapted and applied in changing historical contexts.

The Muslim world also knew pre-modern authoritarianism, followed by European colonialism, which despite its protestations of a "mission to civilize" was seldom motivated by a desire to promote political participation, civil society and democracy. And finally, as noted above, the emergence of modern Muslim states saw authoritarian rulers often placed on their thrones by European colonial powers. Europe along with America, despite their official commitment to the spread of democracy, continued to tolerate and support dictatorships and authoritarian rule in the Muslim world (as in many other parts of the developing world) during the post-independence and Cold War periods out of self interest to block the spread of communism or to assure access to oil.

With regard to the compatibility of Islamic belief and values with democracy, many in the worldwide Muslim community believe that Islam is capable of reinterpretation (*ijtihad*) and that traditional concepts of consultation (*shura*), consensus (*ijma*), and legal principles such as the general welfare (*maslaha*) provide the bases for the development of modern Muslim notions or authentic versions of democracy. While some would reinterpret traditional beliefs to essentially legitimate western generated forms of democracy, others wish to develop their own forms of political participation and democracy appropriate to Islamic values and realities.

The history of Islam's generating and supporting new intellectual traditions with regard to the nature of government and society is historically and religiously possible if not probable. Although we sometimes speak of democracy as if it were a self-evident truth, univocal in meaning and expressed in a single model, in fact the introduction of democracy throughout the world has been accompanied by much scepticism among rulers, elites, and religious leaders alike. Moreover, the western experience has known many forms of democracy from Athens to modern western interpretations and models operative in Europe and America. Thus, the existence of different meanings and understandings of democratization as well as the danger of exploitation of democracy by governments and demagogues must be seen as neither foreign to the West nor to other societies.

A major question faced by Islamic movements concerns their ability, if they come to power, to tolerate diversity, and foster individual rights. The record of Islamic experiments in Pakistan, Iran, the Sudan, and Afghanistan raises serious questions. The extent to which growth of Islamic revivalism has been accompanied in some countries by attempts to limit or silence political and religious opposition, to restrict women's rights, to separate women and men in public, to enforce veiling and to restrict women's public roles in society remains a serious concern. At the same time, issues of democratization, pluralism and civil society are being addressed and debated

by Muslim intellectuals and religious leaders from Egypt, Kuwait and Turkey to Iran and Pakistan.

4. Conclusion and Future Prospects

Islamic movements and organizations, both moderate and extremist, continue to proliferate, serving as major actors and agents of change. They establish modern political and social organizations and embrace modern means to disseminate their messages in the media, and through audio and videotapes, faxes and the Internet. The majority function within civil society as social and political activists. They build schools, hospitals, clinics, and banks; offer inexpensive legal and social services; are leaders in politics and professional associations of doctors, lawyers, engineers, and teachers. At the same time, a minority of extremists wage a war of violence and terrorism that has threatened the stability and security of many regimes and extended its reach beyond the Islamic world to Africa (bombings of US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya), Europe (bombings in Paris) and America (bombing of New York's World Trade Center).

Many governments continue to identify political Islam, simply equated with Islamic fundamentalism and extremism, as the primary threat to national, regional, and international security. This charge has also become an excuse for backing away from the promotion of democratization. However, questions remain. Can the ills of societies be reduced to a single cause or blamed on "fundamentalist fanatics"? Are the activities of a radical minority a convenient excuse for the failure of many governments to build strong and equitable modern states? Does this perceived threat support authoritarian, military/security governments, whose non-elected rulers primary wish is to perpetuate their own power?

Analysis and strategic planning require movement beyond an imagined monolithic political Islam. The diversity reflected in differences between state Islam as seen in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Morocco, Iran, Sudan, Pakistan, Libya or Afghanistan can also be seen in differences among Islamic movements. They range from moderate and pragmatist, those that participate within the system, to radical extremists, those that simply seek to overthrow regimes and impose their own brand of Islam. The Muslim Brotherhoods of Egypt and Jordan, Pakistan's Jamaat-i-Islami, Turkey's Refah Party, Tunisia's Ennahda, and Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front, to name a few, eschewed violence and participated in electoral politics. At the same time, Egypt's Gamaa Islamiyya, Algeria's Armed Islamic Group, and Jihad organizations in many countries have engaged in violence and terrorism.

The strength of Islamic organizations and parties is as much due to their constituting the only viable voice and vehicle for opposition in relatively closed political systems. The electoral strength of Tunisia's Renaissance Party, Algeria's FIS, Egypt and Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood, the Welfare Party in Turkey came not only from a hard core of dedicated followers but also from the fact that they were the most credible and effective alternative to incumbent government. Thus their support has included both those who voted for their Islamic agenda as well as those who simply wished to cast their vote against the government. It is important to note in this context that the membership of most Islamic organizations constitutes a numerical minority, not a majority of the population. Opening up the political system fosters the growth and

strength of competing opposition parties and thus weakens Islamic parties' monopoly of opposition voters. Finally, the realities of a more open marketplace, having to compete for votes, and to rule amidst diverse interests often forces Islamic groups (as they often do secular political parties) to adapt or broaden their ideology and programs in response to domestic realities, diverse constituencies, and interests. The histories of the Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat-i-Islami, Tunisia's Ennahda, Turkey's Refah, Lebanon's Hizbollah and other movements testify to this reality.

The political and economic realities of many states from North Africa to South Asia continue to perpetuate conditions that foster alienation, opposition, and radicalism/extremism. Despite the growing desire for greater political participation and government accountability, authoritarian governments with limited political participation and freedom remain the norm in many countries. The transition of leadership in Syria, Morocco, Jordan, which saw sons succeed their fathers, has brought the hope and expectation of greater, though carefully monitored and limited, freedom. However, it is too soon to tell whether initial policies of greater political and economic freedom will come to fruition.

Authoritarian "security" states, repression, weak economies, maldistribution of wealth, rampant corruption, and an exploding youth population, with issues of education, employment and housing, plague many countries. Sanctions against Iraq have not only had a devastating impact on human life but also fed a popular outrage across the Muslim world that cuts across sectors of society and feeds anti-western sentiments. Western, especially US, military presence further contributes to extremism and terrorism as witnessed in the attack against the USS Cole. The failure of the Oslo peace process and the severity of the Israeli military response to the second intifada, resulting in more than 300 Palestinian deaths and thousands of injuries, foster greater hopelessness, powerlessness and radicalization. The result is the belief among many that a negotiated peace with any Israeli government, Labour or Likud, is futile. Some look to the example of Hizbollah's successful armed resistance to Israel in south Lebanon, arguing that armed struggle, *jihad*, is the only credible strategy.

Western governments and international organizations continue to be challenged not only to guard against the threat of global terrorism but also to address the conditions that contribute to political and social injustice, radicalism and terrorism. This will require a will to encourage, put pressure on and work with governments in the region to promote self-determination, greater political participation, civil society, social justice and respect for human rights.

Regarding the future of Islamic movements and their relations to the state, the comments of one expert on Egypt is equally relevant to other states: "The future development of the Islamic movement depends on how it is treated (or mistreated) by those in power and not on an inherent conflict between Islam and freedom Egypt's rulers can expect to see an Islam that faithfully reflects the skill or folly of their own statecraft."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Bianchi, R., Islam and Democracy in Egypt, *Current History*, February 1989, p. 104

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