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FUNDAMENTALISM



edited by
Abdel Salam Sidahmed
and **Anoushiravan Ehteshami**

*Islamic
Fundamentalism*



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Preface

Political Islam has emerged as a potent force in the Middle East and North Africa, dominating the political and social map of the region. Engaged in an increasingly open struggle for power with the ruling elites in the Arab world, the Islamists have become the main source of political instability in many Arab states. Political developments in the Middle East and North Africa since the late 1970s show that the “fundamentalist phenomenon” is neither a single movement nor the same force in all corners of the region.

This book offers an in-depth, timely analysis of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and other Islamic movements in the contemporary Middle East and North Africa. In original and specially commissioned essays, the contributors examine important differences between the movements and discuss the dissimilar circumstances in which they have emerged, offering new perspectives on their role in the region and prospects for the future. Through detailed case studies, our international team of authors traces the various manifestations of the “fundamentalist phenomenon” and its implications for the divergent nations of the Muslim world and beyond. They map out the power, influence, and presence of the movements in the emerging post-Cold War order and initiate a new dialogue with due appreciation for the current realities and the coming winds of change.

We hope that the interdisciplinary nature of this study will provide specialists, observers of the region, and policymakers with unique insights into the state of Islamist movements and states of the Middle East and North Africa. The book is divided into three parts. The first part, comprising four chapters, tackles issues of a thematic nature, such as Islamic state theories, the paradigm of Islamist movements, and Islamist attitudes about international relations. Youssef Choueiri’s discussion of the political discourse of the Islamist movements is complemented by Suha Taji-Farouki’s examination of the intellectual and practical problems the

Islamists have faced when “formulating” for government. Charles Tripp’s panoramic survey of Islamist movements in action provides evidence for the view that the secular aspects of the structures of power in Middle Eastern states tend to shape Islamic political activity, a conclusion that forms the heart of David George’s contribution to this book. George develops the view that the Islamists’ main predicament is how to counter the existing international order and replace it with “pax Islamica.”

The second and third parts of the book are based on empirical observations of the Islamists in their domestic, natural habitats. The reader is taken on a journey of discovery, from Algeria (Claire Spencer), Tunisia (Muhammad Mahmoud), Sudan (Abdel Salam Sidahmed), and Egypt (Maha Azzam) in North Africa to Syria (Raymond A. Hinnebusch), Jordan (Beverley Milton-Edwards), and Palestine and Israel (Iyad Barghouti) in the Mashreq. One of the highlights is Mahmoud’s focus on one of the most controversial themes in contemporary Islamist discourse—women’s issues—through a detailed analysis of Rashid al-Ghannushi’s writings on the subject.

In addition, in his chapter on Yemen, Eric Watkins traces the rise of Islamism in united Yemen and its place in the country’s post-civil war political order. The successes and failures of non-Arab Iran, the region’s first revolutionary Islamic state, are closely scrutinized by Anoushiravan Ehteshami. Mehdi Mozaffari’s research provides insights into the differences between the 1979 revolution in Iran and the explosive situation in Algeria, complementing the findings of Ehteshami in the case of Iran and Spencer’s observations on Algeria.

Finally, we hope that the reader’s lasting impression of this book will be that “Islamic fundamentalism” is not a single monolith but is still a dynamic political force. These movements are, by definition, political and as such are subject to the secular rules of playing for power. It should become clear that, where in power, the Islamists no longer uphold the ideological purities that they appeared to be fighting for. Many contributors to this book illustrate that Islamist leaders have increasingly realized that power, though sweet, demands responsibility if it is not to turn sour. With responsibility comes cost-benefit analysis and the need to temper and balance utopian expectations of the zealous with the requirements of the state.

*Abdel Salam Sidahmed
Anoushiravan Ehteshami*



Note on Terminology and Transliteration

This book does not follow particular transliteration systems for Arabic and Persian words. Diacritical marks have been kept to a minimum, except for the Arabic ‘ayn (‘). Most transliterated words are italicized at every appearance. Proper nouns, however, including names of sects and organizations, are capitalized but not italicized. Where “Jama‘a” and “Jihad” are capitalized, they indicate names of organizations.

Throughout the text we have used the terms “Islamist(s)” and “Islamism,” rather than “Islamic” or “Islamicist,” to denote the movements of political Islam and its activists.

The list that follows includes only the most common Arabic and Persian words used in the book, that is, those that appear in more than one chapter or are used as key terms in one chapter. “Pers.” indicates Persian words; all others are Arabic.

Terms and Phrases

<i>adawat</i>	tools, procedures (synonymous with <i>asalib</i> ; see <i>uslub</i>)
<i>ahadith</i>	sayings and tradition of Prophet Muhammad; sing. <i>hadith</i>
<i>ahd</i>	covenant
<i>ahdath</i>	events
<i>ahl</i>	people
<i>ahl al-hall wal-‘aqd</i>	those who resolve public matters
<i>akhondism</i> (Pers.)	ecclesiastical

<i>alim</i>	scholar
<i>Allah</i>	God; <i>l'Allah</i> means "to God"
<i>Allahu akbar</i>	God is great
<i>amir</i>	leader; adj. <i>imara</i>
<i>amr</i>	order, preach
<i>amr bi al-ma'ruf</i>	preaching good deeds
<i>amwal</i>	wealth, finances
<i>asr</i>	age, epoch
<i>ata'</i>	charity, allotment
<i>awqaf</i>	endowments
<i>'awra</i>	vice
<i>azadi</i> (Pers.)	movement
<i>bay'at</i>	allegiance
<i>bay'at in'iqad</i>	investiture
<i>bayn</i>	between
<i>bazaar</i> (Pers.)	market
<i>bonyad</i> (Pers.)	foundation
<i>bozorg</i> (Pers.)	great
<i>chellum</i> (Pers.)	fortieth day
<i>dar al-harb</i>	abode of war (non-Muslim land)
<i>dar al-Islam</i>	abode of Islam (Muslim land)
<i>dastur</i>	constitution
<i>da'wa</i>	call, propagation, mission
<i>dawla</i>	state
<i>din</i>	religion
<i>dunya</i>	world
<i>faqih</i>	jurisconsult
<i>faridah</i>	duty
<i>fasad</i>	corruption
<i>fasl</i>	separation
<i>fatwa</i>	authoritative religious decree
<i>fikr</i>	thought
<i>Filistine, Filistiniyya</i>	Palestine, Palestinian
<i>fiqh</i>	jurisprudence
<i>fitna</i>	political upheaval
<i>fuqaha</i>	jurisconsults
<i>ghaybat</i>	occlusion (of the hidden Imam)
<i>Haftum</i> (Pers.)	seventh day
<i>al-hajj</i>	pilgrim
<i>hajj</i>	pilgrimage
<i>hakimiyya</i>	sovereignty
<i>haq</i>	truth

<i>harim</i>	womenfolk; also the separate section of women in the household, the women of a rich person or a sultan (English: harem)
<i>hijab</i>	veil
<i>hisba</i>	procedure of accountability of public officials
<i>hishma</i>	decency
<i>hizb</i>	party
<i>hurriya</i>	freedom; pl. <i>hurriyat</i>
<i>'ibada</i>	worship; <i>'badat</i> means acts of worship (prayer, fasting, reciting)
<i>'iffa</i>	chastity
<i>ijmma'</i>	consensus
<i>ijtihad</i>	independent interpretation of Qur'an and Sunna (Islam's primary sources) and formulation of rules and regulations (see also <i>mujtahid</i>)
<i>Ikhwan</i>	Muslim Brotherhood
<i>'ila</i>	to, toward
<i>imam</i>	leader
<i>imami</i>	shi'i rite (of the twelve Imamites)
<i>iman</i>	faith
<i>infitah</i>	economic liberalization
<i>inhibitat</i>	decadence
<i>Islami</i>	Islamic
<i>istedh'af</i>	subjugation, oppression
<i>istikbar</i>	hegemony, oppression
<i>jabhat</i>	front
<i>Ja'fari</i>	related to Ja'far al-Sadiq, the fourth Imam of the Shi'a and their most renowned scholar
<i>jahil</i>	ignorant
<i>jahili</i>	from <i>jahiliyya</i> (pre-Islamic, or non-Islamic, epoch)
<i>jama'a</i>	group
<i>jama'at</i>	groups
<i>jidd</i>	seriousness
<i>jihad</i>	effort, struggle, holy war
<i>jins</i>	sex
<i>kafir</i>	infidel, nonbeliever
<i>kayd</i>	guile
<i>khitab</i>	address, discourse
<i>kitab</i>	book; when capitalized, denotes the Qur'an
<i>kubra</i>	largest
<i>kufr</i>	infidelity, unfaithfulness

<i>lahw</i>	lasciviousness, lechery
<i>mahkamat al-mazalim</i>	court of iniquities
<i>majlis</i>	council, assembly
<i>mar'a, mar'atu</i>	woman
<i>mashrutah</i> (Pers.)	constitutional
<i>mashura</i>	council (derivative of <i>shura</i>)
<i>maskh</i>	distortion, alienation
<i>mazalim</i>	grievances (see also <i>zalama</i>)
<i>millah</i>	sect
<i>mirath</i>	inheritance
<i>mu'amalat</i>	(legal) matters pertaining to human dealings, mostly used in contrast to <i>'badat</i> , which deals with a person's relationship with God
<i>Muharram</i>	first month in the Islamic calendar
<i>mujahideen</i>	fighters (driven by jihad)
<i>mujtahid</i>	One who interprets the Qur'an and Sunna (Islam's primary sources) and formulates rules and regulations (see also <i>ijtihad</i>)
<i>munhal</i>	permissive
<i>muqaddimah</i>	introduction
<i>Muslimah</i>	feminine of "Muslim"
<i>Muslimin, Muslimun</i>	plural ("Muslims")
<i>mustadh'afun</i>	oppressed
<i>mustakbirun</i>	oppressors
<i>mutlaqah</i>	absolute
<i>nahda</i>	renaissance
<i>nahy 'an al-munkr</i>	preaching abstention from sin
<i>nayib</i>	deputy, caretaker
<i>qabaliyya</i>	tribalism
<i>qanun</i>	law
<i>qaumiyya</i>	nationalism
<i>qiyamah, qiyamatu,</i> <i>qiyamati</i>	Doomsday
<i>Qur'an</i>	the Holy Book of Islam
<i>Qurban</i>	sacrifice; also an annual festival that takes place during Pilgrimage
<i>Rashidun</i>	the first four righteous Caliphs of Islam's early history
<i>rastakhiz</i> (Pers.)	party
<i>salafiyya</i> (from <i>salaf</i>)	"the previous," mainly denoting an orthodox Islamic creed
<i>sana'at</i>	industries

<i>Saqifat bani Sa'ida</i>	the place where the selection of the first Caliph to Prophet Muhammad took place
<i>sawm</i>	fasting
<i>sawt</i>	voice
<i>Sawwum</i> (Pers.)	third day
<i>shabab</i>	youth
<i>sha'bb</i>	people
<i>shahada</i>	martyrdom; testimony pronouncing that there is no other God but Allah and that Muhammad is his messenger
<i>shahid</i>	personality, identity
<i>shari'a</i>	Islamic law
<i>sharikat</i>	companies; sing. <i>sharikah</i>
<i>shaykh</i>	religious or tribal leader
<i>al-shaytan</i>	Satan; the devil
<i>Shi'a</i>	Islamic sect; followers of the Prophet's cousin, son-in-law, and fourth righteous Caliph; Shi'ism, Shi'ite
<i>shura</i>	council (see also <i>marshura</i>)
<i>sirat</i>	the Prophet's biography
<i>Sufism</i>	mysticism; Sufi, Sufist
<i>Sunna</i>	mainstream and largely legalistic school in Islam; Sunnism, Sunnite
<i>suq</i>	market
<i>ta'awun</i>	cooperation
<i>tafsir</i>	exegesis
<i>taghut</i>	extreme oppression (same as <i>istikbar</i> , <i>mustakbirun</i>)
<i>tahaluf</i>	alliance
<i>tahrir</i>	liberation
<i>tajdid</i>	renovation, renewal
<i>talaq</i>	divorce
<i>talfiq</i>	piecing together (mainly of ideas)
<i>taqlid</i>	imitation, traditionalism
<i>taqwa</i>	piety
<i>tarbiyya</i>	education
<i>tawhid</i>	unification, oneness of God
<i>tawzif</i>	employment, investment
<i>ta'ziah</i>	condolence
<i>ulama</i>	scholars
<i>umad</i>	mayors; sing. <i>umdah</i>
<i>umma</i>	community of Muslims

<i>umum</i>	general, universal
<i>umum al-khitab</i>	universal address
<i>uslub</i>	style, procedure, technique; pl. <i>asalib</i>
<i>usrat</i>	family; cell (basic unit of an organisation)
<i>usul</i>	fundamentals; <i>usuliyya</i> , <i>usulyyun</i>
<i>vilayat</i> (Pers.)	vice regency; Arabic <i>wilayat</i>
<i>wa'i</i>	consciousness
<i>waqi'i</i>	realistic
<i>watani</i>	patriotic
<i>wilaya khassa</i>	provincial/local authority
<i>wilaya mutlaqah 'amma</i>	central authority
<i>wizarat al-tanfidh</i>	executive authority
<i>yaum</i>	day
<i>zakat</i>	alms in tax
<i>zalama</i>	oppressors, usurpers



Introduction

ABDEL SALAM SIDAHMED
ANOUSHIRAVAN EHTESHAMI

The phenomenon of “political Islam” continues to dominate the political and social map of the Middle East and North Africa. The region’s political scene since the Kuwait crisis of 1990–1991; events in Algeria since the aborted elections of 1991–1992; the resurgence of Islamist groups in Egypt, the Palestinian occupied territories, and Jordan in the 1990s; the ascendancy of an Islamist force to power in Sudan in 1989; and other events show that “Islamic fundamentalism” is marked by great diversity. This book highlights the differences in these movements and the varying circumstances in which they have emerged and still flourish.

The contributors map out the power, influence, and presence of Islamist movements in the post–Cold War order of the Middle East and North Africa.

The case studies included in Parts 2 and 3 provide a basis for a comparative study and link theoretical considerations to current realities. In looking at these cultures and trends, the authors investigate the causes of Islamic fundamentalism and consider how and why it became the most conspicuous phenomenon in the Middle East during the 1980s and 1990s. They address other important questions as well: For example, do the movements essentially share a common ideology while operating in divergent conditions and circumstances, or do they adopt various ideological discourses and postures in response to divergent sociopolitical circumstances? What are their attitudes toward power, democracy, secularism, international relations, and so on?

In this introduction we neither provide conclusive answers to these questions nor attempt an exhaustive treatment of them. Rather, we preview some of the common themes and answers that emerge from the individual contributions. Before we go on to address these problems, how-

ever, a word on the term “Islamic fundamentalism” and its adequacy as a concept is in order.

Fundamentalism: A Label or a Concept?

The use of the label “Islamic fundamentalism” has become widespread, especially in the media, and is increasingly penetrating academic circles. Yet, if tolerated or even employed as a *label*, the term is still far from being established as a *concept*. Scholars still find it difficult to accept and use it because of its indiscriminate deployment by the media and similar circles and because of its popular association with extremism and fanaticism. Other critics argue that the term gives the mistaken impression of the existence of a monolithic movement throughout the Muslim world, that the term is offensive to those who are regarded as fundamentalists, and, most significantly, that the term was taken from a particular Christian context and deployed into the Islamic field without due appreciation for the appropriate differences and peculiarities of the respective religious contexts.

This assessment is concerned less with apologies for adopting or discarding the term than with identifying the potential or actual problems to be encountered if the term is to be employed as a *concept* in an Islamic context. To this end it is helpful to go back to the Christian genesis of the term. It originated in America early in this century, “when it was applied to ultraconservative Protestant Christian biblical literalists and inerrantists who propounded a list of ‘fundamentals’ that all true Christians should follow.”¹ This definition involves: (1) a tendency to take the Holy Scripture literally and a belief in its inerrancy and (2) adherence to a number of elaborated *fundamentals* as the line of demarcation between true believers and the rest.

How applicable are these features to the Islamic “fundamentalists”? Let us first examine the scripture metaphor. In the case of Islam, the Holy Scripture is the Qur’an. Unlike the scriptures of other Abrahamic religions, the Qur’an has a central place in Islam. According to one scholar of Islam, “Just as Christianity is the religion of and about Jesus, Islam is the religion of the Qur’an.”² It is therefore imperative that all Muslims, regardless of rite, sect, or piety, essentially believe in the inerrancy of the Qur’an as the revealed word of Allah. Hence, if one is to judge by their attitude toward scripture, all Muslims may be classified as “fundamentalists.”³

If Muslims agree on the authenticity and primacy of the Qur’an, however, they occasionally differ with regard to its meaning. By its very nature the text of the Qur’an is formulated in a way that is far from self-explanatory. Accordingly, there is no way of taking the entire text of the

Qur'an literally. It has to be interpreted, a task reserved only for the learned jurists and ulama. The most common form of interpretation is called *tafsir*, or "exegesis." Over the course of time, the exegesis literature has grown in size and diversity to become almost as important as the text itself. Some exegetes emphasized legislation and others labored on theology.⁴ The most important differences, however, occurred between the orthodox and mystical traditions, with the latter more concerned with the hidden meanings of the text. A similar dichotomy may be found between the Shi'i and Sunni schools.

Within this framework there is indeed room for a literalist interpretation as contrasted against a more liberal or rationalist tendency. An important dimension of the problem, however, is that Muslim interpretations of scripture have changed over time with changing conditions and the growth of human knowledge. Consequently, despite the abundance of classical exegesis literature, Islamic revivalists and reformers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries found it important to reinterpret the Qur'an in the light of new circumstances and in respect to the new message they sought to emphasize for Muslims of their own time. In its turn this exercise triggered the growth of modern and contemporary exegesis, which vowed to produce neointerpretations of the Qur'an in a form and content more accessible to contemporary Muslims and more suited to their needs.

Within this framework it is possible to reflect on the attitude of the contemporary Islamist movements toward the Holy Scripture. Curiously enough, there are very few works of exegesis by leaders of the contemporary Islamist movements. In fact, apart from al-Maududi (d. 1979) and Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), there is hardly any significant work by Islamists in this regard. Here, one can only agree with Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, who argued: "As lay scholars of Islam, leaders of . . . fundamentalist movements are not theologians but social thinkers and political activists."⁵

Because of their preoccupation with political activism, leaders of contemporary Islamism have been more concerned with emphasizing segments of the Qur'an that serve their purposes (sometimes the exercise is reduced to extensive quoting of verses) than with interpreting the text itself. Consequently, the line of demarcation that sets the Islamist leaders and followers apart from their coreligionists is their political activism rather than a dogmatic or literalist attitude toward Holy Scripture.

If their attitude toward scripture is not a distinguishing factor of the Islamists, what about the second feature of emphasizing a set of *fundamentals*? Again, all Muslims share a common belief in basic fundamentals known as the pillars of Islam: pronouncement of *shahada* (i.e., to testify explicitly that there is no other God but Allah and that Muhammad is his

messenger); prayer; fasting; almsgiving; and Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca). There are also six articles of the faith (*iman*): belief in Allah, His messengers, Holy books, angels, the Day of Judgment, and Destiny. Together, the pillars of Islam and the *iman* constitute the fundamentals of the Islamic religion and give it much of its particular character.

Since adherence to these fundamentals is an integral part of the faith, then, no distinction between Islamic groups would be possible on these grounds either. Furthermore, these are not the points of emphasis in the discourse of the contemporary Islamist movements, which instead focus on the necessity of establishing an Islamic government or authority to enforce the *shari'a* law. As we shall see, an integrated and common blueprint of what constitutes an authentic Islamic state is still wanting. As for the *shari'a*, there is abundant tradition in this field, but the Islamists rather narrowly focus on the *hudud*—the canonical penalties of the *shari'a*. Since these cover only certain aspects of criminal law, they may not be regarded as *the* fundamentals of Islam.

There is, however, another aspect to the problem of fundamentals. The Arabic equivalent of the term is the word *usuli*, which is one of the key concepts of Islamic jurisprudence. In fact, there is an entire discipline called *'ilm usul al-fiqh* (science of the fundamentals of jurisprudence) that is concerned mainly with the genesis and sources of the general jurisprudential rules. These are to be searched first in the Qur'an, then in the Sunna (Prophet Muhammad's authentic tradition), and finally in the consensus of the jurists (*al-ijmma'*). Scholars who specialize in this field are known as *'ulama al-usul*, or just *al-usulyyun*, which may be literally translated as "fundamentalists."

Interestingly, when translated into Arabic the terms "fundamentalism" and "fundamentalist" become *'usuliyya* and *usuli*, respectively. Equating the English and Arabic terms, however, can be both misleading and confusing given the inherent juristic connotations of the original Arabic concept *usul* and its derivatives. Similarly, when the Arabic terms are applied to contemporary Islamist movements, they may imply either an association with Islamic jurisprudence or an association with a certain set of Islamic fundamentals. On both accounts the usage can only be misleading.

Thus, the word "fundamentalism," with its original Christian implications, should not be brought into an Islamic context for reasons associated both with the particularity of Islam itself and with the discourse of the contemporary Islamist movements.

In recognition of this problem several scholars have attempted a redefinition of the term after stripping it of its Christian connotations.⁶ The most profound examples in this class are Marty and Appleby, who argued that "fundamentalism is here to stay" and that scholars must define or redefine the term rather than "seek idiosyncratic and finally precious

alternatives.”⁷ Furthermore, they maintained that fundamentalism is useful as “a comparative construct encompassing movements within [various] religious traditions.” Accordingly, Marty and Appleby advanced the following definition:

Religious fundamentalism has appeared as a tendency, a habit of mind, found within religious communities and paradigmatically embodied in certain representative individuals and movements, which manifests itself, as a strategy or set of strategies, by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group. Feeling this identity to be at risk in the contemporary era, they fortify by a selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs and practices from a sacred past. These retrieved “fundamentals” are refined, modified, and sanctioned in a spirit of shrewd pragmatism: they are to serve as a bulwark against the encroachment of outsiders who threaten to draw the believers into a syncretistic, areligious, or irreligious cultural milieu. Moreover, these fundamentals are accompanied in the new religious portfolio by unprecedented claims and doctrinal innovations. By the strength of these innovations and the new supporting doctrines, the retrieved and updated fundamentals are meant to regain the same charismatic intensity today by which they originally forged communal identity from the formative revelatory religious experiences long ago.⁸

Indeed this is a rigorous, comprehensive, and inclusive definition. By being both general and comprehensive, it contains many features of the “fundamentalist” movements and hence is useful as a comparative category across the religious board. Yet, when one attempts to apply it to one religious tradition, it becomes less adequate. First of all, the definition is too broad for one religious context. Second, though lengthy beyond practicality, any attempt to narrow it down would most likely be at the expense of its comparative utility. Finally, our assessment has already pointed to the problematic nature of what might constitute Islamic “fundamentals” in general and what is emphasized in the discourse of contemporary Islamists in particular.

Thus, although “fundamentalism” is here to stay as a label, it is yet to be established as a generic concept or comparative category in the field of Islam and Islamist movements. As a label the term is sometimes explicitly rejected or silently avoided by scholars. In other cases it is tolerated and/or redefined narrowly or comprehensively. This is more or less the case with the contributors and editors of this volume.

Genesis and Context

Returning to the questions raised in the beginning of this introduction, let us have a brief look into the genesis of the phenomenon. That is, why has

Islamism become the most conspicuous force in the current political scene of the Middle East? Only general patterns will be identified here, as most of the chapters address the question through individual case studies.⁹

Contemporary Islamism is the product of a sociopolitical process of two decades or more. The roots go back to 1967 when, instead of recapturing Palestine, the Arab states, led by Nasserite Egypt, lost further territories to Israel. The disaster, which shook the credibility of Arab nationalist/populist regimes and forces, sowed the seeds of discontent that later sprouted as Islamist extremist forces. The death of Nasser a few years later seemed to have closed a chapter in the history of the region characterized by slogans of liberation, development, and socialism. Thereafter, although other populist regimes thrived in the region (in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Algeria), with similar structures and discourses, the tide was permanently reversed. A new force was maturing rapidly—namely, Islamism.

Arab Nationalism had dominated the postcolonial political scene and its failure left the region with few alternatives. Two ideologies might have counted: Marxism and liberalism. The latter, however, was a spent force since it was effectively supplanted by the populist Nationalist regimes and was already discredited because of its association with the constitutional experiments pursued under the shadow of colonialism. These experiments were mostly dominated by often corrupt parties of traditionalists, landowners, and other propertied classes. In turn, the social base of these groups was significantly eroded by measures of “land reform” and nationalization adopted by the populist regimes. The Marxist Left, whether organized in Communist parties or not, suffered from two fatal problems: structural disintegration due to oppression by Nationalist regimes, on the one hand, and those regimes’ appropriation of Marxist ideological credentials, on the other. Thus, the Marxist Left was no more ideologically attractive than the Nationalist regimes themselves, which had even contracted “strategic alliances” with the Soviet bloc. It was indeed hard for the Marxist forces to appeal to the public on the grounds of who was the “authentic” socialist.

It was against this background of uncertainty and “ideological vacuum” that the slogan “Islam is *the* solution” was raised and gradually came to gain grounds. The process was aided, however, by other important developments. The oil boom of the 1970s had significantly disrupted the balance in the Middle East by raising the political and economic stakes of Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich states in the Arabian Peninsula. Through its wealth and “religious” prestige, Saudi Arabia was able to ascend to the top of the region’s politics. By implication and design this Saudi dominance had unfolded gradually, causing a consolidation of Islamist ideology throughout the region.

This state of affairs coincided with a systematic policy of rapprochement and even encouragement of Islamist forces in individual countries. As always, Egypt was a pioneer in the process. Sadat, who succeeded Nasser, was eager to undo the legacy of the latter for personal and political reasons. After emerging victorious from a struggle for power with the Nasserite establishment (May 1971), Sadat sought to shore up his legitimacy by relying more and more on Islamist overtones and to consolidate his power by encouraging the Islamists to counter the Nasserite and Marxist Left. A similar process was noted in the Sudan under Nimeiri, who changed course after a collision with the Sudan Communist Party in July 1971. This pattern was to be repeated about a decade later by Chadli Benjedid in Algeria, who, in seeking to undo the legacy of the populist *Bommediane* regime, also courted embryonic Islamist groups.

At the societal level conditions were conducive to the growth of Islamist forces. Social dislocation resulting from or accompanying economic "development," rapid urbanization, destruction of traditional institutions, expansion of education, and social mobility had resulted in the growth of deep social tensions and discontent. This environment was compounded by the growing inability of the states to provide necessary services for their subjects as a result of mounting economic crises.

The combination of these factors created fertile ground for the growth of the Islamist forces and movements either in the form of a revival and consolidation of the "multinational" Muslim Brotherhood movement, as occurred in Egypt, Sudan, and Jordan, or in the form of the emergence of a new movement with similar credentials, as in Algeria and Tunisia. The process was facilitated further by many forms of assistance and funding from Saudi Arabia and its allies. Moreover, in the spirit of Cold War politics, the United States and its Western allies also sought to aid the Islamist groups in the Middle East as a bulwark against infiltration of Communist influences in that strategic region. Then came the Iranian revolution.

Despite its particularity and Shi'ite ideology, the Iranian revolution was a grand moment for the Islamist forces at large. It provided them with a strong sense of inspiration and encouragement and demonstrated that an Islamic revolution was indeed a realistic objective. From being a center of westernization and secularism, Iran had overnight become a center of Islamist politics and agitation. Saudi Arabia, hitherto the champion of Islamism, did not take kindly to that dramatic development. At best it meant the creation of another center, and a Shi'ite one for that matter, competing for the leadership of the Islamic world. However, the worst was to be expected from Iran, which soon engaged in actual or suspected attempts to export its revolution across the Gulf. The primary concern of Saudi Arabia and its regional and international allies became how to contain revolutionary Iran. The outbreak of the war between Iran and Iraq in

1980 provided Saudi Arabia et al. with their best chance. The *secular* Iraq was unreservedly supported against an overtly *Islamist* regime.

The rising Islamist forces, however, were not less pragmatic. Despite their declared sympathy with Iran they were careful not to cross the line and fall out of favor with the Saudi Party. If anything, they even benefited from the overt and covert competition between Riyadh and Tehran over the patronage of the Islamist movements.

Down to the end of the 1980s the Islamist forces held a delicate balance between Riyadh and Washington on the one hand and Tehran on the other, while enjoying the support of all. A case in point in this regard was the Afghan mujahideen, who were supported by a combination of all these forces.

As a result of this complex process of support and relationships, the mainstream Islamist forces were able to build a formidable international network extending through a broad range of religious, political, economic, and welfare institutions. In its turn this network enhanced their power and eventually enabled them to assume independent postures.

At the end of the 1980s and in the beginning of the 1990s, three important developments disrupted the balance: the rise to power of an Islamist force in Sudan in 1989, the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989 and 1990, which effectively ended the Cold War, and the second Gulf war, which occurred in 1990 and 1991.

The end of the Cold War meant that an alliance between the West and the Islamist groups was no longer a necessity for both sides. Moreover, the collapse of the Soviet bloc had effectively removed even the remotest possibility of a "socialist" alternative in the region. During the second Gulf war the majority of the Islamist forces, to the surprise of many observers, sided with Iraq against Kuwait and its allies.¹⁰ Regardless of the calculations involved and the outcome of the war, that position achieved something for the Islamists. It was during the Gulf crisis and war that these movements definitely parted company with Saudi Arabia and its U.S. allies—that is, they made the vital transition from a pro-Western to an anti-Western force. The significance of this step is that it enhanced their ideological and political independence to challenge the legitimacy of entire regimes in the region, including that of Saudi Arabia, as non-Islamic. By the same token, the anti-American rhetoric was needed to enhance their legitimacy as proponents of the most authentic and original *Islamic* alternative. The government in Sudan, which underwent "conversion" to Islamist control in 1989, sets an example for these movements, provides them with a "haven," and could serve as a springboard for further bids of power.

It is against this background that current Islamist movements arose in individual countries. As subsequent chapters show, these patterns did not

produce uniform results throughout the region. Thus, whereas some movements achieved substantial influence and growth, others struggled for survival. Some movements were co-opted in the political process and allowed a degree of legal or semi-legal operation, and others were banned and actively suppressed. Essentially, these manifestations and experiences differed owing to differences in history, social conditions, political structures, and processes, on the one hand, and to differences in interpretations of the message of Islam and its meaning for our times, on the other. Taken together, these two aspects might explain the divergent discourses and postures of Islamist movements and their multiplicity even in the same country.

Ideology and Pragmatism

The common underlying feature of contemporary Islamist movements is that they all believe in the “cause” of establishing an Islamic state or order. The central theme in this process is that within the framework of this order the Islamic *shari’a* law would be thoroughly enforced. Apart from this insistence on the *shari’a* there is no monolithic approach toward what should constitute an authentic Islamic order. This issue may be investigated at three levels: theory, practical approaches, and political adjustment.

On theoretical grounds there are some models and blueprints for an Islamic order. Famous among these is Khomeini’s blueprint of *vilayat-e faqih*, which now constitutes the official ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Another was the project of the Islamic Liberation Party (Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami), which called for reestablishing the Islamic Caliphate in the contemporary world since it is regarded as the most “authentic form of Islamic government” (see Chapter 2). Despite important concessions made by Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani in recognition of contemporary realities, the idea of resurrecting the Caliphate reflects nostalgia more than it sets an objective for practical implementation. It did not gain any significant ground among the Islamist forces and remained confined to the minority Islamic Liberation Party, which could not achieve multinational expansion similar to that of the Muslim Brothers.

Khomeini’s vision, though representing an important innovation in the traditional Shi’i political thought, remained mostly confined to that tradition. His main achievement was to successfully advocate the necessity and possibility of establishing an “Islamic government” under the guardianship of the jurists rather than waiting for the return of the “hidden Imam.” The concept of *vilayat-e faqih* is rooted in and substantiated by the existence of an institutionalized and hierarchical Shi’a “clergy” un-

matched in the Islamic Sunni world. Hence, despite the immense influence of the Iranian revolution on the Islamist movements, the concept of *vilayat-e faqih* remained peculiar to Iran.

Nonetheless, other aspects of "Khomeinism" came to have a greater impact and influence on contemporary Islamism. Khomeini's rhetoric of the "disinherited of the earth," his dire hostility to the West and its "arrogance" and materialism, and more significantly, his populism penetrated with varying degrees the discourse of contemporary Islamist movements.

Alongside Khomeini two other theoreticians figured prominently in the ideological foundation of contemporary Islamism: al-Maududi and Sayyid Qutb. To al-Maududi is attributed the foundation of an "Islamic" political theory, the central theme of which is the concept of God's sovereignty (*hakimiyya*). Among other things, this concept entails that human beings can exercise power only in the name of Allah and in pursuit of His teachings and regulations. Sayyid Qutb elaborated the peculiar thesis that today's world is essentially living through an epoch of *jahiliyya* (godlessness and perplexity) and that true Muslims have a duty to withdraw from this society, establish their own righteous one, and reconquer the *jahili* order.

Emphasizing common ground between the three ideologues—Khomeini, Maududi, and Qutb—Youssef Choueiri's assessment in Chapter 1 reveals that in the projection of those Islamist theoreticians Islam is essentially incompatible with the modern "secular" reality and that an Islamist blueprint can only grow and flourish at the expense of this reality and as a negation of it.

Another vision adopts a vaguer attitude toward state and society while emphasizing political activism in the name of Islam and an emphatic call for enactment of an Islamic constitution and/or *shari'a* law. This view may be traced to the founder of the Muslim Brothers organization, Hasan al-Banna, and today is perhaps best represented by Hasan al-Turabi of Sudan and Rashid al-Ghannushi of Tunisia. Of course, the three do not hold identical views on all matters, but in general they are more concerned with establishing and expanding their movements and achieving power through whatever means. In the process, they are willing to make necessary ideological concessions either in recognition of the requirements of contemporary realities or in order to attract new recruits who could be put off by strict adherence to dogmatism. Consequently, an Islamist movement may coexist with or operate within a non-Islamist sociopolitical framework until the moment is ripe to replace it.

It could be argued that whereas the first discourse, which emphasized a withdrawal from and a break with the "godless" world of today, gradually produced and nurtured the extremist movements, the second discourse produced mainstream movements. Whereas the former operate on

the edge of society and on the periphery of its political structures, the latter, whether legalized or not, work through sociopolitical means for mobilization of the populace to their cause. Although essentially correct, this distinction is not as categorical as it appears.

Indeed it was Qutb's, Maududi's, and Khomeini's ideas that inspire the proliferating extremist groups (commonly known as al-Jama'at) who are currently engaged in violent struggles with the regimes in Egypt, Algeria, and elsewhere (see Chapters 5 and 6). Those ideologues, however, were no founders of extremist minority groups. Khomeini led a massive revolution that overthrew a powerful regime and replaced it with an Islamist one, al-Maududi founded a mainstream organization—Jamati Islami of Pakistan—and Sayyid Qutb was a prominent figure of the mainstream Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Rather, it was the unique interpretation of the ideas of these leaders that gave rise to the current extremist movements.

Two conclusions may be drawn from this assessment. First, the extremist groups are essentially the children, legitimate or not, of the mainstream movements. Second, and consequently, the difference between the two is less a question of ideology or ultimate objectives than a matter of practical approach. In other words, both aspire to the realization of an "Islamic" order and state; the problem is how to achieve that goal.

Elaborating further, one might suggest that there are no clear, definitive lines of demarcation between the mainstream and extreme groups, only points of engagement and disengagement. Take, for example, the attitude toward violence. It was Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the mainstream movement(s), who first legitimized violence and established a secret organization for that purpose, which soon became associated with assassinations and killings during the 1940s and early 1950s. The revolutionary Iran became widely associated with acts of violence and terrorism on a world scale and served as a source of inspiration and assistance to extremist groups throughout the region. Today, the Sudanese regime, led and backed by the National Islamic Front, a mainstream movement, is reportedly harboring extremist groups, particularly from neighboring countries. In a word, the mainstream movements are not necessarily immune to the violent tactics associated with extremist groups. Much depends on the strategy of the movement in question and the reality under which it operates. Accordingly, the movements that operate in an atmosphere of legality or semi-legality need not use violence against the state or other adversaries. However, they can watch the latter engage in almost daily skirmishes with their kin, the Jama'at. They may count on the expectation that this deadly dispute between the regimes in question and the Jama'at would weaken the former and eventually erode its ability to rule, therefore strengthening their chances of attaining power. Another

facet of the problem is the ruthless violence and oppression inflicted by the Islamist regimes in Tehran and Khartoum against their opponents. Consequently, violence could be a point of both engagement and disengagement between the mainstream and extreme.

A clear point of disengagement, however, arises from their divergent tendencies toward dogmatism and pragmatism. In the case of the extremist Jama'at, there is a strong reductionist and exclusivist tendency in identifying what is Islamic and what is not. Sometimes, the boundaries are reduced to the number of the group, which implies condemning the rest of the society to infidelity or *jahiliyya*. The mainstream movements, in contrast, have a strong sense of pragmatism, either adjusting to particular political realities, as in the cases of Jordan, the Palestinian occupied territories, and Israel, or adjusting to realities of power, as in the cases of Iran and Sudan. Each of these two categories has its own logic and implications. In the case of the Islamist movements in Jordan and Israel, the process mainly involves adopting a more flexible and concessionary program for the purpose of attracting a wider spectrum of the population and electorate. It also involves postponing some of the important, albeit controversial, themes, such as the nature of their project of creating an Islamic state, for fear of antagonizing the respective regimes. As for the Islamist regimes, however, the process involves a more fundamental concession: It means succumbing to reality, be it local or international, rather than engaging in a process of transforming it. Ironically, this kind of pragmatism might eventually involve "secularizing" the avowed Islamist project rather than Islamicizing the respective structures of state and society.

Islamists and Democracy

It is essential to conclude this introduction with a word on Islamism and democracy. The universality of democracy is the predominant feature of the current post-Cold War order. Yet, although various democratic experiments are being pursued from Latin America to southern Africa, the Middle East has lagged behind. Has this anything to do with Islam as the religion of the majority of the Middle Eastern peoples? In other words, is Islam inherently incompatible with democracy?

These are indeed abstract questions—to answer them is similar to considering whether Islam is a religion only, or a religion and a state! History shows that when it comes to public and societal matters religions and religious teachings are what people make of them, not what they inherently entail. Thus, the Islamic institution of the Caliphate came into existence, evolved, and was even legitimized after the death of the Prophet Muhammad and the termination of revelation. Likewise, some of today's Mus-

lims are at pains to legitimize democracy on the grounds of the Islamic tradition of *shura* (council), and others condemn it as an encroachment on God's supremacy.

More appropriate, perhaps, is to inquire about the attitude of the Islamists toward democracy as a system and a concept. This question is increasingly becoming a center of controversy and heated debate, particularly since the cancellation of parliamentary elections in Algeria (January 1992). One dimension of the question is whether the Islamists *believe* in democracy.

To deal with this question in an appropriate manner, it is important to remember that democracy is both a procedure and a system of government. With regard to democracy as a procedure of transition to power, the positions of the Islamist movements fall primarily into two categories: One endorses democracy as a way of attaining power, and the other disapproves of this option (see Chapter 1). In other words, most of these movements are happy with democracy as long as it provides them with freedom of organization and action and even the prospect of power.

Nevertheless, if while enjoying freedom of organization and expression the Islamists were presented with a chance of reaching their goals through means other than the ballot box, they would utilize it without remorse. This attitude appears cynical but there is contemporary evidence that it is prevalent—as in the case of the Sudanese National Islamic Front (NIF, al-Jabha al-Qawmiyya al-Islamiyya), which overthrew a democracy in which it enjoyed representation in parliament and even government in order to rule the country alone. The leader of NIF, Hasan al-Turabi himself, once endorsed all means of attaining power—whether revolutionary, democratic, or a coup d'état—as legitimate.¹¹

The problem of democracy as a system of government is complex because it is associated with the essence of the Islamist project—that is, the establishment of an Islamic state or order. Here it does not help much to search in the conflicting literature and statements of Islamists concerning the “democratic” nature of the projected Islamic state. Neither does it serve any purpose to resort to speculative questions, such as whether the Islamists would uphold democratic principles if they came to power through elections. An alternative approach is to look in the essential tenets of the Islamist ideology itself.

In the first place, there seems to be an inherent contradiction between the *absolutist* nature of Islamist ideology and the *relativist* character of democracy. It is a contradiction between a force that sees itself as a custodian of the divine message, hence as having a monopoly on truth, and a system built on relative truths and opinions.¹² Second, even when an Islamist party endorses democracy, not just as a procedure but also as a concept and principle, it will not have the same value for them as it has

for a liberal secularist. This attitude is intimately associated with the Islamic Utopia. As put by Lahouari Addi, the Islamic Utopia means "a City not regulated by politics but by morality."¹³

Finally, Islamists adhere with varying degrees of emphasis to the supremacy of the *shari'a*, to which both rulers and society must be subjected. The essential problem with this scheme lies less in the qualifying feature it imposes on the full adoption of democratic principles than in the additional and largely unaccountable power given to those entrusted with interpretation of the *shari'a*. Here, unlike the classical Islamic Ages, interpretation of the *shari'a* is no longer the prerogative of specialized ulama but the jurisdiction of Islamist leaders and movements. By appropriating for themselves the right of solely deciding what is Islamic and what is not for the rest of the community, Islamist leaders have assumed the roles of both governors and adjudicators while denying everyone else a similar share in public affairs.

It follows, therefore, that the Islamist ideology and the ideology of democracy are inherently incompatible. This is, however, not a conclusive judgment. The authoritarian nature of the Islamist discourse is more a question of political agenda and choice than a matter of cultural authenticity, as is often claimed. In reality, the Islamist leaders have borrowed liberally from Western culture and ideologies, including fascism and communism.¹⁴ Theoretically, there is no reason why this borrowing should not be extended to democracy and modernity. In other words, a synthesis between Islamism and democracy may be possible.

Such a synthesis is possible, however, only if democracy becomes the dominant tradition to which the Islamist movements are forced to adapt themselves and their ideology. The present political scene in the Middle East and North Africa does not point in this direction. Democracy is not likely to blossom out of the current conflict between the authoritarian regimes, populist or oligarchies, and the equally authoritarian Islamist opposition.

Yet, put in its wider context, the present conflict between the regimes and the Islamist opposition is an important manifestation of the accelerated disintegration of the ailing social order that came to dominate the region after World War II in association with the rise of postcolonial states.

If, judging by the experience of other regions, the key word in the establishment of a new order is "democracy," then the future invariably involves complex questions of structures, forces, ideologies, and frameworks, and above all a consensus that this is indeed the most appropriate alternative. The basic prerequisite in such a process would be the rise of a force or coalition of forces that would come out in favor of democracy and fight it out. Then and only then would a discussion of a synthesis between Islamism and democracy become meaningful.

Notes

1. Frederick M. Denny, *An Introduction to Islam* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 345.
2. Ibid.
3. John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 7–8.
4. Cf. Kenneth Cragg, *The Mind of the Qur'an* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1973).
5. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalism Observed* (The Fundamentalism Project) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. For further accounts of these processes, see Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World* (translated by Alan Braley) (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994), pp. 21–46, and Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London: Routledge, 1991).
10. See James Piscatori (ed.), *Islamic Fundamentalisms and the Gulf Crisis* (The Fundamentalism Project) (Chicago: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1991).
11. Abdel Salam Sidahmed, "Iran, Sudan and Algeria: A Setback in the Grand Plan?" *Middle East International*, February 1992.
12. For an inspiring discussion on the issue of Islamism and democracy, see Lahuari Addi, "Islamicist Utopia and Democracy," and William Zartman, "Democracy and Islam," in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, special issue on *Political Islam*, edited by C. E. Butterworth and W. Zartman, November 1992, pp. 120–130 and 181–191, respectively.
13. Addi, "Islamicist Utopia and Democracy."
14. Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993).