



FUNDAMENTALIST ISLAM AT LARGE

THE DRIVE FOR POWER

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ABSTRACT

The nature of fundamentalist Islam, and even the use of the term, is hotly debated. But this debate is largely a self-indulgent exercise of analysts. Within Islam, there are Muslims who have created an “-ism” out of Islam — a coherent ideology, a broad strategy, and a set of political preferences. They do not defy definition. They defy the world.

* The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

As the century closes, two words, Islam and fundamentalism, have become intimately linked in English usage. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English now defines fundamentalism as the “strict maintenance of ancient or fundamental doctrines of any religion, especially Islam.” However problematic this formula, it does acknowledge that fundamentalism in Islam is today the most visible and influential of all fundamentalisms.

The nature of fundamentalist Islam, and even the use of the term, is hotly debated. But this debate is largely a self-indulgent exercise of analysts. Within Islam, there are Muslims who have created an “-ism” out of Islam — a coherent ideology, a broad strategy, and a set of political preferences. They do not defy definition. They defy the world.

WHAT IS FUNDAMENTALIST ISLAM?

What is fundamentalist Islam? Its contradictions seem to abound. On the one hand, it manifests itself as a new religiosity, reaffirming faith in a transcendent God. On the other hand, it appears as a militant ideology, demanding political action now. Here it takes the form of a populist party, asking for ballots. There it surges forth as an armed phalanx, spraying bullets. One day its spokesmen call for a jihad (sacred war) against the West, evoking the deepest historic resentments. Another day, its leaders appeal for reconciliation with the West, emphasizing shared values. Its economic theorists reject capitalist materialism in the name of social justice, yet they rise to the defense private property. Its moralists pour scorn on Western consumer culture as debilitating to Islam, yet its strategists avidly seek to buy the West’s latest technologies in order to strengthen Islam.

Faced with these apparent contradictions, many analysts in the West have decided that fundamentalism defies all generalization. Instead they have tried to center discussion on its supposed “diversity.” For this purpose, they seek to establish systems of classification by which to sort out fundamentalist movements and leaders. The basic classification appears in many different terminological guises, in gradations of subtlety.

We need to be careful of that emotive label, 'fundamentalism', and distinguish, as Muslims do, between revivalists, who choose to take the practice of their religion most devoutly, and fanatics or extremists, who use this devotion for political ends.[1]

So spoke the Prince of Wales in a 1993 address, summarizing the conventional wisdom in a conventional way. The belief that these categories really exist, and that experts can sort fundamentalists neatly into them, is the sand on which weighty policies are now being built.

Fundamentalist Islam remains an enigma precisely because it has confounded all attempts to divide it into tidy categories. "Revivalist" becomes "extremist" (and vice versa) with such rapidity and frequency that the actual classification of any movement or leader has little predictive power. They will not stay put. This is because fundamentalist Muslims, for all their "diversity," orbit around one dense idea. From any outside vantage point, each orbit will have its apogee and perigee. The West thus sees movements and individuals swing within reach, only to swing out again and cycle right through every classification. Movements and individuals arise in varied social and political circumstances, and have their own distinctive orbits. But they will not defy the gravity of their idea.

The idea is simple: Islam must have power in this world. It is the true religion—the religion of God—and its truth is manifest in its power. When Muslims believed, they were powerful. Their power has been lost in modern times because Islam has been abandoned by many Muslims, who have reverted to the condition that preceded God's revelation to the Prophet Muhammad. But if Muslims now return to the original Islam, they can preserve and even restore their power.

That return, to be effective, must be comprehensive; Islam provides the one and only solution to all questions in this world, from public policy to private conduct. It is not merely a religion, in the Western sense of a system of belief in God. It possesses an immutable law, revealed by God, that deals with every aspect of life, and it is an ideology, a complete system of belief about the organization of the state and the world. This law and ideology can only be implemented through the establishment of a truly Islamic state, under the sovereignty of God. The empowerment of Islam, which is God's plan for mankind, is a sacred end. It may be pursued by any means that

can be rationalized in terms of Islam's own code. At various times, these have included persuasion, guile, and force.

What is remarkable about fundamentalist Islam is not its diversity. It is the fact that this idea of power for Islam appeals so effectively across such a wide range of humanity, creating a world of thought that crosses all frontiers. Fundamentalists everywhere must act in narrow circumstances of time and place. But they are who they are precisely because their idea exists above all circumstances. Over nearly a century, this idea has evolved into a coherent ideology, which demonstrates a striking consistency in content and form across a wide expanse of the Muslim world.[2]

FUNDAMENTALIST FORERUNNERS

Afghani

The pursuit of power for Islam first gained some intellectual coherence in the mind and career of Sayyid Jamal al-Din "al-Afghani" (1838-97), a thinker and activist who worked to transform Islam into a lever against Western imperialism. His was an age of European expansion into the heartlands of Islam, and of a frenzied search by Muslims for ways to ward off foreign conquest.

In many respects, Afghani was the prototype of the modern fundamentalist. He had been deeply influenced by Western rationalism and the ideological mode of Western thought. Afghani welded a traditional religious hostility toward unbelievers to a modern critique of Western imperialism and an appeal for the unity of Islam, and while he inveighed against the West, he urged the adoption of those Western sciences and institutions that might strengthen Islam. Afghani spread his unsettling message in constant travels that took him to Cairo, Istanbul, Tehran, and Kabul. He visited Paris, London, and St. Petersburg as well, where he published and lobbied on behalf of revolutionary change.

A contemporary English admirer described Afghani as the leader of Islam's "Liberal religious reform movement." [3] But Afghani—not an Afghan at all, but a Persian who concealed his true identity even from English admirers—was never what he appeared to be. While he called for the removal of some authoritarian Muslim rulers, he ingratiated himself with others. While he had great persuasive power, he did not shrink from conspiracy and violence. A disciple once found him pacing back and forth, shouting: "There is no deliverance except in killing, there is no safety except in killing." [4] These were not idle words. On one occasion, Afghani proposed to a follower that the ruler of Egypt be assassinated, and he did inspire a supple disciple to assassinate a ruling shah of Iran in 1896. Afghani was tempted by power, and believed that "power is never manifested and concrete unless it weakens and subjugates others." Quoting this and other evidence, one Arab critic has argued that there is a striking correspondence between Afghani's thought and European fascism. [5]

Was Afghani a liberal or a proto-fascist? A reformist or a revolutionary? Was he the forerunner of those fundamentalists who plead their case in political ways? Or those who open fire on the motorcades of government ministers? Afghani was at these things, and one can only wonder how today's taxonomists (and with them, the Prince of Wales) would have classified him. Some fundamentalists still pose this same intractable dilemma of classification, although most of them have far weaker "liberal" and "reformist" credentials than had Afghani.

Banna

Between Afghani and the emergence of full-blown fundamentalism, liberal and secular nationalism would enjoy a long run in the lands of Islam. Europe had irradiated these lands with the idea that language, not religion, defined nations. In the generation that followed Afghani, Muslims with an eye toward Europe preferred to be called Arabs, Turks, and Persians. "If you looked in the right places," wrote the British historian Arnold Toynbee in 1929, "you could doubtless find some old fashioned Islamic Fundamentalists still lingering on. You would also find that their influence was negligible." [6] Yet that same year, an Egyptian schoolteacher

named Hasan al-Banna (1906-49) founded a movement he called the Society of the Muslim Brethren. It would grow into the first modern fundamentalist movement in Islam.

The Muslim Brethren emerged against the background of growing resentment against foreign domination. The Brethren had a double identity. On one level, they operated openly, as a membership organization of social and political awakening. Banna preached moral revival, and the Muslim Brethren engaged in good works. On another level, however, the Muslim Brethren created a “secret apparatus” that acquired weapons and trained adepts in their use. Some of its guns were deployed against the Zionists in Palestine in 1948, but the Muslim Brethren also resorted to violence in Egypt. They began to enforce their own moral teachings by intimidation, and they initiated attacks against Egypt’s Jews. They assassinated judges and struck down a prime minister in 1949. Banna himself was assassinated two months later, probably in revenge. The Muslim Brethren then hovered on the fringes of legality, until Gamal Abdel Nasser, who had survived one of their assassination attempts in 1954, put them down ruthlessly. Yet the Muslim Brethren continued to plan underground and in prison, and they flourished in other Arab countries to which they were dispersed.

Safavi

At the same time, a smaller and more secretive movement, known as the Devotees of Islam, appeared in Iran, under the leadership of a charismatic theology student, Navvab Safavi (1923-56). Like the Muslim Brethren, the Devotees emerged at a time of growing nationalist mobilization against foreign domination. The group was soon implicated in the assassinations of a prime minister and leading secular intellectuals. The Devotees, who never became a mass party, overplayed their hand and were eventually suppressed. Navvab himself was executed, after inspiring a failed assassination attempt against another prime minister. But the seed was planted. One of those who protested Navvab’s execution was an obscure, middle-aged cleric named Ruhollah Khomeini, who would continue the work of forging Islam and resentment into an ideology of power.

In the checkered history of Afghani, the Muslim Brethren, and the Devotees of Islam, clear patterns emerge. They saw foreign domination as a symptom of Muslim weakness, and its elimination as the key to Muslim power. Such domination could be attacked directly by jihad against foreigners, or indirectly by promoting an Islamic awakening. Those who gave priority to direct confrontation sometimes favored alliances with other nationalists who opposed foreign rule. In Afghani's anti-imperialist campaign, especially against the British in Egypt, he took all manner of nationalists as allies, including non-Muslims who became some of his most ardent disciples. The Muslim Brethren, who joined the attacks against the British presence in the Suez Canal zone, had many ties to the Egyptian Free Officers who overthrew the monarchy in 1952, but their vision of an Islamic state eventually made them bitter enemies of the new regime. The Devotees of Islam, while thoroughly antiforeign, never collaborated with secular nationalists, whom they deeply distrusted. Whatever their strategies, however, they all worked to redress the gross imbalance of power between Islam and the West.

They also sought to replace weak rulers and states with strong rulers and states. Such a state would have to be based on Islam, and while its precise form remained uncertain, the early fundamentalists knew it should not be a constitutional government or multiparty democracy. Preoccupied with the defense of Islam and the acquisition of power, they preferred the strong rule of a just and virtuous Muslim. Afghani, the "Liberal," did not advocate constitutional government. His biographer, reviewing the famous Arabic newspaper published by Afghani in Paris, has noted that "there is no word in the paper's theoretical articles favoring political democracy or parliamentarianism." Afghani simply envisioned "the overthrow of individual rulers who were lax or subservient to foreigners, and their replacement by strong and patriotic men." [7] The Muslim Brethren in Egypt also rejected party politics. Banna demanded the abolition of all political parties in Egypt and the creation of a single Islamic party. Within this party there could be elections, but electoral campaigning would be limited, voting would be compulsory, and elections would be done by list, which Banna said would "liberate the representative from the pressure of those who elected him." Banna pointed to Stalin's Soviet Union as a model of a successful one-party system. [8] Navvab also allowed elections, but all representatives had to be "devout Muslims," who would be kept "under the supervision of an

assembly of pious religious leaders in order to keep [their] activities in line with the Islamic provisions.”[9] This preference for a strong, authoritarian Islamic state, often rationalized by the claim that Islam and democracy are incompatible, would become a trademark of fundamentalist thought and practice.

The pursuit of this strong utopian state often overflowed into violence against weak existing states. These “reformers” were quick to disclaim any link to the violence of their followers, denying that their adepts could read their teachings as instructions or justifications for killing. Afghani set the tone, following the assassination of Iran’s shah by his disciple. “Surely it was a good deed to kill this bloodthirsty tyrant,” he opined. “As far as I am personally concerned, however, I have no part in this deed.”[10] Banna, commenting on the assassinations and bombings done by the Muslim Brethren, claimed that “the only ones responsible for these acts are those who commit them.”[11] Navvab, who failed in his one attempt at assassination, sent young disciples in his stead. For years he enjoyed the protection of leading religious figures while actually putting weapons in the hands of assassins.[12] (Only when abroad did he actually boast. “I killed Razmara,” he announced on a visit to Egypt in 1954, referring to the prime minister assassinated by a disciple three years earlier.)[13] But despite the denials, violence became the inescapable shadow of fundamentalist Islam from the outset—and the attempt to separate figure from shadow, a problematic enterprise at best.

The fundamentalist forerunners also determined that fundamentalist Islam would have a pan-Islamic bent. The peripatetic Afghani took advantage of steamship and train, crossing political borders and sectarian divides to spread his message of Islamic solidarity. His Paris newspaper circulated far and wide in Islam, through the modern post. Egypt’s Muslim Brethren also looked beyond the horizon. In 1948, they sent their own volunteers to fight the Jews in Palestine. Over the next decade, branches of the Muslim Brethren appeared across the Middle East and North Africa, linked by publications and conferences. Egyptian Brethren fleeing arrest set up more branches in Europe, where they mastered the technique of the bank transfer.

The fundamentalist forerunners even laid bridges over the historic moat of Sunni prejudice that surrounded Shi'i Iran. Iran's Devotees of Islam mounted massive demonstrations for Palestine, and recruited 5,000 volunteers to fight Israel. They were not allowed to leave for the front, but Navvab himself flew to Egypt and Jordan in 1953, to solidify his ties with the Muslim Brethren. Visiting the Jordanian-Israeli armistice line, he had to be physically restrained from throwing himself upon the Zionist enemy.[14] Navvab presaged those Iranian volunteers who arrived in Lebanon thirty years later to wage Islamic jihad against Israel.

From the outset, then, fundamentalists scorned the arbitrary boundaries of states, and demonstrated their resolve to think and act across the frontiers that divide Islam. The jet, the cassette, the fax, and the computer network would later help fundamentalists create a global village of ideas and action—not a hierarchical “Islamintern” but a flat “Islaminform”—countering the effects of geographic distance and sectarian loyalty. Not only has the supposed line between “revivalist” and “extremist” been difficult to draw. National and sectarian lines have been erased or smudged, and fundamentalists draw increasingly on a common reservoir for ideas, strategies, and support.

A resolute anti-Westernism, a vision of an authoritarian Islamic state, a propensity to violence, and a pan-Islamic urge: these were the biases of the forerunners of fundamentalist Islam. No subsequent fundamentalist movement could quite shake them. Indeed, several thinkers subsequently turned these biases into a full-fledged ideology.

An Ideology of Revolution

In the middle of this century of ideologies, the fundamentalists set out to transform Islam into the most complete and seamless ideology of them all. All-encompassing Islamic law, based upon the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, constituted their ideological manifesto and program. Many of the provisions of that law had been remote ideals, enforced unevenly over the centuries by weak states. Now fundamentalists, recognizing the enhanced coercive power of the modern state, began to imagine that this law could be implemented in its entirety, and that this

total order would confer hitherto unimaginable strength on the Islamic state. Fundamentalist ideology therefore insisted not only on power, but on absolute power—an insistence, admits one advocate of an Islamic state, that “has tended to make modern Islamists into proto-fascists, obsessed with dragging their compatriots kicking and screaming into paradise.”[15]

Mawdudi

Much of the ideological spadework was done by Mawlana Abu'l-A`la Mawdudi (1903-79), the founder of the fundamentalist Jama`at-i Islami in India and Pakistan. His many writings, translated into every major language spoken by Muslims, provide a panoramic view of the ideal fundamentalist state. In this state, sovereignty would belong to God alone, and would be exercised on his behalf by a just ruler, himself guided by a reading of God’s law in its entirety. As an ideological state, it would be administered for God solely by Muslims who adhered to its ideology, and “whose whole life is devoted to the observance and enforcement” of Islamic law. Non-Muslims, who could not share its ideology, and women, who by nature could not devote their entire lives to it, would have no place in high politics. Everything would come under the purview of this Islamic state. “In such a state,” announced Mawdudi, “no one can regard any field of his affairs as personal and private. Considered from this aspect the Islamic state bears a kind of resemblance to the Fascist and Communist states,” although Mawdudi rejected individual dictatorship, instead advocating a variety of one-party rule. Mawdudi was certain about what the Islamic state would not resemble: it would be “the very antithesis of secular Western democracy.”[16] Mawdudi himself never had a sufficient following to make a concerted bid for power in Pakistan, but his writings exerted a wide influence over fundamentalists better positioned to act upon his vision.

Qutb

Mawdudi’s ideas were carried to their ultimate conclusion by an Egyptian Muslim Brother, Sayyid Qutb (1906-66). Qutb borrowed heavily from Mawdudi’s vision of an Islamic state, but he broke new ground in his analysis of how to realize it. Mawdudi had written about the need for

a “revolution” to create an Islamic state, but he believed this revolution had to be prepared by a long campaign of persuasion. Qutb, confined to one of Abdel Nasser’s prison camps when he wrote his major work, was far more impatient. Islam was under assault, and redemption could not wait for a bloodless revolution. Qutb urged that a believing vanguard organize itself, retreat from impious society, denounce lax Muslims as unbelievers, and battle to overturn the political order. As Qutb put it, “those who have usurped the power of God on earth and made His worshippers their slaves will not be dispossessed by dint of Word alone.”[17] Qutb thus transformed what had been a tendency toward violence into an explicit logic of revolution. He hardly had the chance to act on his theory, for he spent almost a decade in prison before his final arrest and execution. But later fundamentalists would return to his writings, to justify their own resort to force.

Qutb also placed the anti-imperialism of the early fundamentalists on an ideological footing. He attributed his own Islamic awakening to a period of more than two years spent in America from 1948. America repelled him on every level. It was, he claimed, a disastrous combination of avid materialism and egoistic individualism that commercialized women and practiced a ferocious racism. Qutb went still further, claiming that there existed something called “Crusaderism”—a systematic plan to eradicate Islam linking medieval Christianity, modern imperialism, and Western consumer culture. “Western blood carries the spirit of the Crusades within itself,” wrote Qutb. “It fills the subconscious of the West.”[18] Qutb’s work would later prove crucial to the fundamentalist rationale that formal independence from the West had to be accompanied by a purging of Islam’s own bloodstream of all Western cultural influence.

Khomeini

It was Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-89) who finally wrote the ideological formula for the first successful fundamentalist revolution in Islam. Khomeini added nothing to fundamentalist ideology by his insistence on the need for an Islamic state, created if necessary by an Islamic revolution, but he made a breakthrough with his claim that only the persons most learned in Islamic law could rule: “Since Islamic government is a government of law, knowledge of the law

is necessary for the ruler, as has been laid down in tradition.” The ruler “must surpass all others in knowledge,” and be “more learned than everyone else.”[19] Since no existing state had such a ruler, Khomeini’s doctrine constituted an appeal for region-wide revolution, to overturn every extant form of authority and replace it with rule by Islamic jurists. In Iran, where such jurists had maintained their independence from the state all along, this doctrine transformed them into a revolutionary class, bent on the seizure and exercise of power. Much to the astonishment of the world—fundamentalists included—the formula worked, carrying Khomeini and his followers to power on a tidal wave of revolution in 1979.

Khomeini also revalidated the anti-Western and anti-American credentials of fundamentalism. Qutb’s idea of “Crusaderism” had worked particularly well in Egypt and the Levant, where the legacy of the Crusades could be resurrected from the depths of collective Muslim memory, but it did not speak to the people of Iran, a land untouched by the Crusades. Khomeini thus drew a striking metaphor to make the same point: America, historical heir to unbelief, was the “Great Satan.” This posited an absolute conflict between Islam and the West, not just in history but in eschatology.[20] It was dramatized by the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Teheran and the 444-day detention of its staff. In fundamentalist ideology, political conflict with the West was transformed into a timeless cultural and religious conflict with the “enemies of Islam,” led by America and represented on the ground by its proxy, Israel.

Not all of Khomeini’s ideas had a full impact on wider Islam. His legitimation of rule by Islamic jurists proved difficult for other fundamentalist movements to assimilate, because it assumed such jurists were inclined to take an oppositional stand. In Sunni lands, Islamic jurists usually served the state, and Sunni movements therefore tended to coalesce under lay leaders. Likewise, while Khomeini’s anti-Americanism struck a deep chord, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980 diffused its impact. Sunni movements mobilized to wage an international Islamic jihad against the Soviets, and were even ready to cooperate temporarily with America to do so.

Khomeini’s delegitimation of rule by nominal Muslims kings and presidents, though, found a powerful echo, and he demonstrated how a revolution might succeed in practice. Khomeini also

showed how cultural alienation could be translated into a fervid antiforeign sentiment, an essential cement for a broad revolutionary coalition. Later it would be assumed that only “extremists” beyond Iran were thrilled by Iran’s revolution. In fact, the enthusiasm among fundamentalists was almost unanimous. As a close reading of the press of the Egyptian Muslim Brethren has demonstrated, even this supposedly sober movement approached the Iranian revolution with “unqualified enthusiasm and unconditional euphoria,” coupled with an “uncritical acceptance of both its means and goals.”[21] Sunni doubts would arise about implementation of the Islamic state in Iran, but for the next decade, much of the effort of fundamentalists would be invested in attempts to replicate Khomeini’s success and bring about a second Islamic revolution.

The attempts to make a second revolution demonstrated that fundamentalists of all kinds would employ revolutionary violence if they thought it would bring them to power. Frustrated by the drudgery of winning mass support, full of the heady ideas of Mawdudi and Qutb, and inspired by Khomeini’s success, they lunged forward. From the wild-eyed to the wily, Sunni fundamentalists of all stripes began to conspire. A messianic sect seized the Great Mosque in Mecca in 1979. A group moved by Qutb’s teachings assassinated Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981. The Muslim Brethren declared a rebellion against the Syrian regime in 1982. Another path of violence paralleled this one—the work of the half-dozen Shi`i movements in Arab lands that had emerged around the hub of Islamic revolution in Iran. They targeted their rage against the existing order in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, and the smaller Gulf states. In Iraq, they answered Khomeini’s appeal by seeking to raise the country’s Shi`is in revolt in 1979. In Lebanon, they welcomed Iran’s Revolutionary Guards in 1982, first to help drive out the Israelis, then to send suicide bombers to blow up the barracks of U.S. and French peacekeepers there in 1983. Another Shi`i bomber nearly killed the ruler of Kuwait in 1985. Some of Khomeini’s adepts went to Mecca as demonstrators, to preach revolution to the assembled pilgrims. Others hijacked airliners and abducted foreigners. Khomeini put a final touch on the decade when he incited his worldwide following to an act of assassination, issuing a religious edict demanding the death of the novelist Salman Rushdie in 1989.

This violence was not an aberration. It was a culmination. From the time of Afghani, fundamentalists had contemplated the possibility of denying power through assassination, and taking power through revolution. Because resort to political violence carried many risks, it had been employed judiciously and almost always surreptitiously, but it remained a legitimate option rooted firmly in the tradition, and it became the preferred option after Iran's revolution emboldened fundamentalists everywhere. For the first time, the ideology of Islam had been empowered, and it had happened through revolution. Power for Islam seemed within reach, if only the fundamentalists were bold enough to run the risk. Many of them were. They included not just the avowed revolutionaries of the Jihad Organization in Egypt, but the cautious and calculating leaderships of the Muslim Brethren in Syria and the Shi'i Da'wa Party in Iraq.

It was a seesaw battle throughout the 1980s. Nowhere was Iran's experience repeated. The masses did not ignite in revolution, the rulers did not board jumbo jets for exile. Regimes often employed ruthless force to isolate and stamp out the nests of fundamentalist "sedition." Fundamentalists faced the gaol and the gallows in Egypt. Their blood flowed in the gutters of Hama in Syria, Mecca in Saudi Arabia, and Najaf in Iraq. Yet fundamentalists also struck blows in return, against government officials, intellectuals, minorities, and foreigners. While they did not take power anywhere, they created many semi-autonomous pockets of resistance. Some of these pockets were distant from political centers, such as the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon and several governates of Upper Egypt, but fundamentalists also took root in urban quarters and on university campuses, where Islamic dress for women became compulsory and short-cropped beards for men became customary. From time to time, impatient pundits would proclaim that the tide of fundamentalist Islam had gone out, but its appeal obviously ran much deeper. Its straightforward solution to the complex crisis of state and society spoke directly to the poor and the young, the overqualified and the underemployed, whose numbers were always increasing faster than their opportunities.

After Iran's revolution and the subsequent revolts, it was impossible to dismiss the ideological coherence fundamentalist Islam had achieved. It had succeeded in resurrecting in many minds an absolute division between Islam and unbelief. Its adherents, filled with visions of power, had

struck at the existing order, turned against foreign culture, and rejected not only apologetics but politics—the pursuit of the possible through compromise. Fundamentalism mobilized its adherents for conflict, for it assumed that the power sought for Islam existed only in a finite quantity. It could only be taken at the expense of others: rulers, foreigners, minorities. Fundamentalists did not admit the sharing of this power, anymore than they admitted the sharing of religious truth, and although fundamentalists differed on the means of taking power, they were unanimous on what should be done with it. One observer has written that even in Egypt, where the fundamentalist scene seemed highly fragmented, the political and social program of the violent fringe groups “did not seem to differ much from that of the mainstream Muslim Brethren,” and was shared by “almost the whole spectrum of political Islam.”[22] This was true, by and large, for fundamentalist Islam as a whole.

Repackaging the Islamic State

Yet at the same time, a younger generation of thinkers added crucial refinements to the ideology, adapting it to the times. Even fundamentalists could not reject the West in its entirety. The West, despite fundamentalist faith in its ultimate decline, continued to produce technologies and institutions that gave it immense power. Muslims, to acquire that power, had to import these tools or risk being overwhelmed completely. This next generation of thinkers imagined the Islamic state not so much as a bulwark against the West, but as a filter screening the flow of Western innovations and influences. This ideological filter would admit whatever might enhance the power of the Islamic state and reject whatever might diminish the unity and resolve of Islamic society. It took a different kind of fundamentalist leader to play this role—Muslims who knew the West’s strengths and weaknesses first-hand, who had themselves come through the searing fire of its skepticism with their belief intact.

Turabi

Sudan’s Hasan alt-Turabi (b. 1932) is the most notable representative of this successor generation. Coming from a strong religious background, Turabi took a doctorate in law at the

Sorbonne from 1959 to 1964. Unlike Qutb, he was not altogether repelled by his sojourn in the lands of unbelief: “I was excited by the richness and precision of the French language, the culture, the history of the revolution, the relations between church and state, and the study of the different constitutions. I was not focused exclusively on my law studies. I went to the national library, I visited museums.”[23] This unique formation has helped to transform Turabi into the maître of contemporary “Islamism,” for he is presumed to know the West intimately enough to decide what should be borrowed and what should be spurned. His partnership with the military regime in Sudan, since 1989, has put him in the best position of any contemporary fundamentalist to implement an Islamic state.

Ghannushi

Another member of this generation is Rashid al-Ghannushi (b. 1941), leader of the Tunisian fundamentalist movement.[24] Ghannushi took to the ideas of the Muslim Brethren while studying philosophy in Damascus, where he also witnessed the Arab debacle in June 1967. Ghannushi briefly continued his preparation in philosophy at the Sorbonne in the crucial year of the 1968 student uprising. By his own account, he read not only the works of Islamic philosophers, but Descartes, Bacon, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Althusser.[25] But on his return to Tunisia, he preferred to teach the ideas of Mawdudi, Banna, and Qutb to an emerging fundamentalist movement. Ghannushi repeatedly ran afoul of the Tunisian authorities, and in 1989 chose voluntary exile. He is now a political refugee in Britain, where he plays the role of the foremost defender of Islamism in the West. His region-wide stature derives from the fact that he speaks knowingly from the belly of the beast.

Fadlallah

A third figure of comparable stature, certainly among Shi`is, is Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah (b. 1936) of Lebanon. Fadlallah, born in Iraq of Lebanese Shi`i descent, is a product of the Shi`i academies of Najaf in Iraq. But even there, he was drawn to study the forbidden knowledge of philosophers and unbelievers, as he himself later hinted: “My studies, which were

supposed to be traditional, rebelled against tradition and all familiar things.”[26] Fadlallah arrived in Beirut in 1966, at a time when the city often mistook itself for an arrondissement of Paris. In this marketplace of ideologies, Fadlallah learned to package Islam in a highly competitive way. He, too, produced a nuanced argument for borrowing from the West while battling it. In the course of the 1980s Fadlallah became the oracle and mentor of Hizbullah, preaching dialogue and resistance in the same breath.

Turabi, Ghannushi, and Fadlallah did not rewrite the idea of the Islamic state developed by Mawdudi, Qutb, and Khomeini. They repackaged it. They understood that the young doubted whether the secular West really intended a crusade against Islam, and so they played down the themes of “Crusaderism” and the “Great Satan,” substituting the more fashionable rhetoric of Third World anti-imperialism. This came naturally, for they had overheard the West incriminate itself during their own sojourns in and near its privileged academe. Their arguments for the inevitable triumph of Islam drew upon the dark prophecies of the West’s decline that have emanated from European and American philosophers for a century. At the same time, they understood that many of the young had been influenced by notions of class struggle. This they incorporated by developing a terminology that referred to Muslims as the “dispossessed” of “the South.”[27] Not surprisingly, fundamentalists even managed to find apologists among the West’s own Third Worldists, who thought they heard an echo in the words pumped from Islamist pulpits. (“Because they hate us, they must be right,” wrote a French writer in irony. “What a wonderful coincidence that the revelation of truth coincided with anti-imperialist struggle!”)[28]

The genius of the new thinkers, though, was to create a climate that could sustain an altogether different analogy. They understood that many of the young had a sneaking or grudging admiration for the science and democracy of the liberal West. Thus, they claimed that elements of both could be selectively borrowed if this served to strengthen Islam. Without sacrificing any element of ideological principle, they worked to present Islamic fundamentalist movements as the functional equivalent of the “reform” movements of the former communist bloc.

This latest repackaging not only has brought new adherents to fundamentalist movements, but has persuaded a surprising number of the West's most hopeful observers of the Middle East that "Islam is the solution." They now argue that beneath a monolithic façade, Islamism has grown diverse, and carries the seed of the long-awaited reform of Islam. "Islam is now at a pivotal and profound moment of evolution," announces a journalist, "a juncture increasingly equated with the Protestant Reformation." [29] "This is, indeed, the most exciting period in Islamic religious history since the twelfth century," gushes a professor. [30]

But who are the "reformers" who supposedly are making the first breakthrough in seven centuries? Where are the pathfinding texts without which a "Reformation" is impossible? As one Western critic of Islamist thought observes, since the writings of the founders, compiled well before Iran's revolution, "there are nothing but brochures, prayers, feeble glosses and citations of canonical authors." [31] In works written a generation ago or more, Fundamentalist Islam became a coherent ideology, resting on a fixed canon. The road to redemption leads through the Islamic state of the kind envisioned by Mawdudi, Qutb, and Khomeini. Turabi speaks for nearly all fundamentalists when he dismisses the need for any further thought: "Those Muslims who venture to reform Islam because they are impressed by the Western Reformation. . . did write a few books, but they did not go very far. They did not impress any Muslim." [32] For Turabi's generation, the intellectual work of thinking through an Islamic state has already been done. It is now a matter of repackaging the vision and mobilizing Muslims for its implementation. Turabi himself puts it best: Islamist movements are today "without elitism or obsession with quality." They represent "quantity and the people." [33]

So far, there has been no "reform," and certainly no "Reformation." While fundamentalist ideology has been refashioned at its edges, its core remains consistent and stable. A decade ago, Hasan Hanafi, another Sorbonne-schooled Islamist, described this irreducible and unalterable core:

In the past, Islam found its way between two falling empires, the Persian and the Roman. Both were exhausted by wars. Both suffered moral and spiritual crises. Islam, as a new world order, was able to expand as a substitute to the old regime. Nowadays, Islam finds itself again as a new

power, marking its way between the two superpowers in crisis. Islam is regenerating, the two superpowers are degenerating. Islam is the power of the future, inheriting the two superpowers in the present.[34]

A decade later, the Soviet Union is gone and the fundamentalists of Islam claim they pose the last ideological challenge to the last superpower. Ahmad Khomeini, son of the man who detonated the first explosion, summarized the fundamentalist point of view: “After the fall of Marxism, Islam replaced it, and as long as Islam exists, U.S. hostility exists, and as long as U.S. hostility exists, the struggle exists.”[35] This Islam, forged by a century of thought, claims the status of a world ideology. For fundame, the proof of its validity will not be found in the number of souls it wins but in its empowerment of Islam.

Purge Before Power

To achieve that, of course, Islamism must first come to state power. Given the strength of existing regimes, its leaders must build coalitions with other groups if they are to stand any chance of breaking out of encirclement. And it is here that Islamism seems to be failing. The Islamic revival was perhaps most flexible at its outset, in the preaching of Afghani. He altered his message to accommodate a wide range of political alliances, and his biographer has rightly described his interpretation of Islam as “more ‘progressive’ than that of the modern revivalists—more open to new ideas and not concerned with reinforcing the Islam of the past.”[36] Guile can sometimes compensate for a lack of flexibility: Khomeini’s interpretation of Islam was not “progressive,” but he struck just such a posture before the revolution, allowing him to forge a coalition of diverse forces. Because the shah’s state collapsed so fast, that coalition swept him to power before it unwound in recriminations and purges. A capacity for dissimulation, such as that so effectively cultivated in Shi`i Islam, is an immense asset in the art of politics, and goes far to explain how leaders like Afghani and Khomeini found crucial allies.

In contrast, today's Islamists, certainly in the Arab world, are unwilling to suspend enough of their belief to find a common ground with potential partners. Their words and deeds frighten many Muslims, even those who long for change. The reason is violence—not against the West, but against other Muslims. Even in opposition, Islamist movements cannot resist the temptation to intimidate opponents, rivals, and even lukewarm supporters. The kind of purge Khomeini carried out once in power is being attempted by Islamist movements today, when it only serves to isolate them. Sayyid Qutb's idea of an unbelieving society, the basis of Islamism as ideology, is the congenital defect of Islamism as politics. Its deleterious effects can be seen in the continuing bloodshed between Islamic movements in Afghanistan, in the murder of intellectuals in Egypt, in the indiscriminate bombings against civilians in Algeria. Islamists claim they have been forced to follow the methods of the regimes they oppose, but if this is so, why should anyone prefer them? Regimes invoke the threat of Islamist "terror" precisely because there is a genuine dread of it in society at large. As a result, the Islamists have no allies, and without allies their chances of assuming power are slim.

Dissimulation

There are some Islamists who know this, and who are trying (late in the day) to borrow a page from Khomeini's techniques of dissimulation. But for dissimulation to succeed, it must be consistent and seamless. As it is now practiced by many Islamists, dissimulation is no more than telling each audience whatever it prefers to hear. It is not too difficult to assemble these utterances and demonstrate their incompatibility. This is why Turabi, Fadlallah, and Ghannushi, despite protestations of pluralism, create deep unease among liberals, leftists, nationalists, and feminists, who might have been allies. They overhear the full discourse on the Islamic state—a discourse in which one can hear democracy, free expression, and equal rights denounced as Western cultural imperialism.

Turabi is the only leading Islamist whose alliance-building has given him some access to power in Sudan, but his friends are generals and colonels. In the absence of other allies, the temptation of befriending the military may also prove irresistible to other fundamentalist movements. If so,

Islamism will then have filled not only the same political space as Arabism. It will have made the same fatal choice. At some point, it dawned on the military partners of the Arab nationalist ideologues that they could do without the guidance of a Sati` al-Husri or a Michel Aflaq. They could formulate ideology for themselves, whenever needed. Likewise, generals and colonels who take leading Islamists as guides are likely to discard them, even as they appropriate their ideas and language. Perhaps this will be the next phase of Islamism, as men of theory are thrust aside by new military potentates, hungry for Islamic legitimacy. Libya's Mu' ammar al-Qadhafi is perhaps the transitional man in this gradual shift from Arab to Islamist military rule.

But this is only speculation, and it is impossible to predict the future fortunes of Islamism. Of its many outcomes, only one seems absolutely certain. Like Arabism, Islamism may fail; and like Arabism, Islamism may fail at great cost, its adherents gradually becoming its victims. But by then, it will have launched a hundred careers and a thousand books. Of Marxism, it has been said that it failed materially everywhere but in Western academe, where its professors turned it into tenure and grants. Islamism seems destined to do the same.

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Notes:

.1H.R.H. The Prince of Wales, *Islam and the West*: a lecture given in the Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford on 27 October 1993 (Oxford: Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, 1993), p. 16.

.2For the two most comprehensive explorations of fundamentalist ideology, see Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theory and Modern Politics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale

University Press, 1985); and Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London: Routledge, 1991).

.3Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt* (London: Unwin, 1907), p. 100.

.4Quoted by Elie Kedourie, *Politics in the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 274.

.5Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 85.

.6Arnold Toynbee, *A Journey to China* (London: Constable, 1931), p. 117.

.7Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani": A Political Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 225-26.

.8Quoted by Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 261-62.

.9Quoted by Said Amir Arjomand, "Traditionalism in Twentieth-century Iran," in Said Amir Arjomand, ed., *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 210.

.10Quoted by Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani,"* p. 412.

.11Quoted by Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, p. 70.

.12Farhad Kazemi, "The Fada'iyan-e Islam: Fanaticism, Politics and Terror," in *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam*, p. 169.

.13Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, p. 126 n. 66.

.14Yann Richard, "L'Organisation des fedâ'iyân-e eslâm, mouvement intégriste musulman en Iran (1945-1956)," in Olivier Carré and Paul Dumont, eds., *Radicalismes islamiques* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985), vol. 1, pp. 29, 51.

.15Abdelwahhab El-Affendi, *Who Needs an Islamic State?* (London: Grey Seal, 1991), p. 87.

.16Quoted by Charles J. Adams, "Mawdudi and the Islamic State," in John L. Esposito, ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 119-21.

.17Quoted by Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 55.

.18Quoted by Sylvia Haim, "Sayyid Qutb," *Asian and African Studies*, March 1982, p. 154.

- .19Imam Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley, Calif.: Mizan Press, 1981), p. 59.
- .20William O. Beeman, "Images of the Great Satan: Representations of the United States in the Iranian Revolution," in Nikki R. Keddie, ed., *Religion and Politics in Iran* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 191-217.
- .21Rudi Matthee, "The Egyptian Opposition on the Iranian Revolution," in Juan R. I. Cole and Nikki R. Keddie, eds., *Shi'ism and Social Protest* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 263. See also Emmanuel Sivan, "Sunni Radicalism in the Middle East and the Iranian Revolution," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 21 (1989), pp. 1-30.
- .22Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Egyptian Politics under Sadat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 202-3.
- .23Interview with Turabi, *Le Figaro*, Jan. 25, 1994.
- .24See Linda G. Jones, "Portrait of Rashid al-Ghannoushi," *Middle East Report*, July-Aug. 1988, pp. 19-24.
- .25Interview with Ghannoushi, *Maghreb Review*, 2, no. 1 (1986), p. 33.
- .26Interview with Fadlallah, *Voice of Lebanon*, May 2, 1992, in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Report: Near East and South Asia* (hereafter FBIS), May 5, 1992.
- .27This tendency has been identified by Nikki R. Keddie, "Islamic Revival as Third Worldism," in Jean-Pierre Digard, ed., *Le cuisinier et le philosophe: Hommage à Maxime Rodinson* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1982), pp. 275-81. Keddie notes that "many current spokesmen of the Islamic revival have taken some of their ideas from non-religious third worldism," an influence so pervasive that "even a man so apparently separated for most of his life from Western currents of thought as Ayatollah Khomeini echoes third worldism (in fact often leftist third worldism)".
- .28Pascal Bruckner, *The Tears of the White Man: Compassion as Contempt*, trans. William R. Beer (New York: Free Press, 1986), p. 33.
- .29Robin Wright, "Islam, Democracy and the West," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1992, p. 133.
- .30Richard Bulliet, quoted in Timothy D. Sisk, *Islam and Democracy: Religion, Politics, and Power in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1992), p. 60.
- .31Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 60.

.32 Transcript of remarks by Hasan al-Turabi before the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., May 12, 1992.

.33 Hasan Turabi, "Islam, Democracy, the State and the West," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1992), p. 51.

.34 Hassan Hanafi, "The Origin of Modern Conservatism and Islamic Fundamentalism," in Ernest Gellner, ed., *Islamic Dilemmas: Reformers, Nationalists, and Industrialization* (Berlin: Mouton, 1985), p. 103.

.35 Speech by Ahmad Khomeini, Oct. 20, 1991, in FBIS, Oct. 21, 1991.

.36 Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, 2d ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983)