

# THE FUTURE OF POLITICAL ISLAM

GRAHAM E. FULLER

palgrave  
macmillan

# CONTENTS

<i>Dedication</i>	v
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	xi
1. The Anguish of Islamic History	1
2. The Uses of Political Islam: Islamism in Action	13
3. Islamist Polarities	47
4. Islamism and Global Geopolitics	67
5. Islam and Terrorism	83
6. Islamism in Power: Iran, Sudan, and Afghanistan	97
7. Islamism in Politics	119
8. Islamism and the West	145
9. The Impact of Global Forces on Political Islam	167
10. The Future of Political Islam: Its Dilemmas and Options	193
<i>Notes</i>	215
<i>Index</i>	221

# INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS POLITICAL ISLAM? How does it act in the world? What challenges does it pose to the world, and what challenges does it face? And finally, where is it headed? These are the fundamental questions addressed in this book.

These questions became a whole lot less academic with the 11 September 2001 attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, which suddenly brought Middle East politics home to Americans with a vengeance. What is in many ways a struggle within the Middle East had burst out of its confines to affect everyone. The East and the West are now just beginning a long process of sorting out the repercussions that touch upon the nature of entrenched and ineffective Middle Eastern regimes, their Islamist oppositions, Western hostility, and the presence of terrorist groups feeding off all these problems.

Yet, even as the West demonstrates a new and heightened attention to Islam, a basic ongoing, long-term struggle for the soul of Islam within the Muslim world is also intensifying under the new pressures. Political Islam is growing, expanding, evolving, and diversifying. And it will be an inevitable if not a dominating feature of politics in the Muslim world for quite some time to come. Islamic terrorism itself may represent only a thin wedge of the overall Islamic political spectrum, but it has the power to set the broader agenda between “Islam and the West” as Usama bin Ladin and the resultant American War Against Terrorism have demonstrated.

Here we must immediately define terms. *Islam* is a religion. Use of this word applies, properly speaking, only to the religion itself. We cannot accurately say that “Islam is on the march” or that “Islam is anti-Western”; it is rather the practice and activities of *Muslims* that can be so described. Most of the time we are talking about how Muslims *choose to understand* what Islam says about a great variety of issues on the practical level.

I use the terms *political Islam* or *Islamism* synonymously and extensively throughout the book. Readers should be warned that I define these terms perhaps more broadly than some other analysts do, reflecting the reality of the phenomenon. In my view an Islamist is one who believes *that Islam as a body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim World and who seeks to implement this idea in some fashion*. The term “political Islam” should be neutral in character, neither pejorative

nor judgmental in itself; only upon further definition of the specific views, means, and goals of an Islamist movement in each case can we be critical of the process. I prefer this definition because it is broad enough to capture the full spectrum of Islamist expression that runs the gamut from radical to moderate, violent to peaceful, democratic to authoritarian, traditionalist to modernist.

I also employ the term *Islamic fundamentalism*, but only to refer to those Islamists who follow a literal and narrow reading of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet, who believe they have a monopoly on the sole correct understanding of Islam and demonstrate intolerance toward those who differ. Many fundamentalists will insist on the absolute primacy of applying all Islamic laws as the sole touchstone of Islamic legitimacy. Fundamentalism is not the same as traditionalism at all; it can be radical in its departure from the status quo of traditional Islamic understanding and in fact seeks to implement change through a "back to basics" approach. All fundamentalists are Islamists, but not all Islamists are fundamentalist by any means, since Islamism includes those who interpret political Islam in a more modern or liberal sense as well.

## THE LURE OF ISLAMIST POLITICS

There are important reasons for examining political Islam—quite apart from trying to understand Middle East terrorism. To the casual observer political Islam may be an exotic and remote world, seemingly locked in a time warp linked to seventh century values and struggles. The reality is rather different. Islamist politics could not be more central to modern political and social development: Islamists are struggling, like so much of the rest of the developing world, with the genuine dilemmas of modernization: rampant change of daily life and urbanization at all levels, social dislocation and crisis, the destruction of traditional values, the uncertain threats of globalization, the need for representative and competent governance, and the need to build just societies and to cope with formidable political, economic, and cultural challenges from the West. Most Islamists look forward and not backward in the quest to establish a better moral foundation for society in order to confront the demands of contemporary life and globalization. Their preoccupations reflect the ongoing concerns of much of the rest of the world, even if we are at different stages of managing them. It is a central thesis of this book *that political Islam is not an exotic and distant phenomenon, but one intimately linked to contemporary political, social, economic and moral issues of near universal concern.*

We in the West are often uncomfortable with the presence of religion, certainly in the public sphere. Yet a study of religion in society in general compels us to

grapple with many of the most complex, fascinating, revealing, and important issues of contemporary politics. Religion is intimately linked to human psychology and culture. The history of the human quest to derive philosophical and spiritual meaning out of life provides the raw material for much of the greatest literature, thought, philosophy of history, architecture, art, and music. Religion encompasses our values, aspirations, and vision of life, our quest to find meaning in our existence, our fears of our mortality, our concerns for what is right and wrong in this world, our aspirations to bring moral values to bear on the construction of our political and societal existence, our quest for spiritual fulfillment on the often trying paths of daily life, our sense of community and our relations with our fellow men and women, and finally a sense of awe toward creation. All human beings are faced with these issues and are compelled to provide some answers for themselves, including those who do not consider themselves religious. Political Islam is very much at the heart of this quest in the Muslim world. And the superimposition of contentious international geopolitics further complicates and intensifies the expression of political Islam at the local level.

Many in the contemporary post-industrial world have come to express a certain antipathy to religion, especially organized religion, believing it to contain a measure of intolerance and the remnants of human superstitions not yet eliminated by advances in natural science. Yet few can remain indifferent to the issues raised by religion. That the disputation of religion is generally excluded from the Western salon only underscores the reality of its continuing power as a sensitive and emotive force in human society.

When religion is linked with politics, two of the most vital elements of human concern come together. This conjuncture can be for better or for worse: both religion and politics have consistently exploited each other across the web of history. Indeed, how could politics ever remain indifferent to such a powerful motive force as religion? And how could religion, with its vision of the place of human existence in the grand scheme of things, remain uninterested in the form, expression, and direction of human society and politics?

Americans in particular feel understandable ambivalence about the relationship of religion to politics. The American secular tradition, ironically, is not due to an American indifference to the role of religion in life. On the contrary, it emerged from the concerns of those passionately committed to religion and the preservation of its diverse forms that brought its adherents early on to the American continent; their goal was precisely to preserve their faith and its expression from the power of the state that had oppressed it back home. America today remains the most religious country in the industrialized world while still broadly committed to

separating religion and the state as much as possible, for the protection of both. Yet the most emotional features of American politics are exactly those that entail religious concerns, even if they are not expressed in explicitly religious terms. The public goes to the barricades as soon as talk turns to abortion or the right to life, euthanasia and the right to die, the understanding and teaching of sexuality, the norms of sexual conduct and its alternative “lifestyles,” the dilemma of cheating, the nature of divorce law, single-parent families, the nature and welfare of the family, and the search for the most desirable forms of social organization. These issues are profoundly religious (or moral) in content and character, even if we in the West do not always choose to formulate them in those terms. Islamic politics approach this linkage more directly, unabashedly, and explicitly.

To write about Islam in politics—and politics in Islam, then—is to examine the universal phenomenon of religion and politics as it happens to be expressed in the Muslim world. It sheds an indirect light on expression of these same universal issues in the West as well. And through examination of Islamic fundamentalism we also explore some of the most sensitive and central features of life in the Muslim world; we gain insights into the political, religious, social, and psychological aspects of Muslim society as a whole. Indeed, *the vehicle of political Islam might be one of the very best ways to understand the politics of Muslim world in general—far more revealing than to follow Marxist, socialist, nationalist, or even democratic politics of Muslim societies*. The reason is simple: Islam pervades the daily life of Islamic society and political culture more profoundly than any other single ideological or conceptual force.

The entire issue of relations between Islam and the West forces us to explore comparative civilizations, the reasons for their rise and fall, and the interactions among them. How do we explain a period of one thousand years when Islam was the preeminent world civilization, only to founder in the face of a newly ascendant West? To the West, history of course “ends” with the universal supremacy of the Western ideals. Yet any historian would be loath to make such an assumption, and indeed many Muslims today ponder the possibility of a time when the balance between the two civilizations will be restored—or even reversed.

## ISLAMISM AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

One of the most striking features of Islamist politics today is the extraordinary pace and speed of its evolution. If this book had been written even a decade ago there would be numerous questions about the direction of its evolution—on issues

such as democracy, civil society, parliaments, and political parties—that are now clearer, making it easier to sense their trajectory.

In fact, political Islam is probably the fastest moving force in politics in the Muslim world today. While the thinking of Western-educated Muslim elites may be quite sophisticated, such groups represent only a thin veneer of the broader political order and do not yet have serious mass impact. They speak a Westernized language that is not yet part of the normal flow of mass political discourse. Ironically it is often through an Islamist framework today that mass political thinking is advanced on questions of just government, representative, responsible and answerable government, and the techniques of mass mobilization for political ends. At the same time some of these movements can also be a force for intolerance, authoritarian impulses, and even great violence.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

This book is ultimately about the future. *Does political Islam represent the last heroic stand of Muslim cultural resistance to galloping globalization with an American accent? Or does it represent the beginning of a new synthesis of Islam with contemporaneity, enabling Muslim society and culture to move into the new millennium more confident of its own cultural foundations?*

Throughout the book I emphasize the striking feature of the *youthfulness* of Islam in modern politics: we are talking about movements that have been important on the political scene for only a few decades (even if a few go back well into the last century) and that have been rapidly evolving over that period. Some of these movements may turn out to be as evanescent as a meteor in the night sky—arresting while visible but soon gone and forgotten. But half a century hence, what will we identify as having been the truly determinative elements in the history of political Islam? Indeed, will political Islam itself turn out to be only a transitional phenomenon in the Muslim world during a certain difficult phase of its development? Present difficulties have indeed contributed to its rise. Will it be viewed as having been a bad experiment, best forgotten? Or a seminal development leading to profound and necessary long-range change? Given the profusion of these movements, some will indeed be viewed as serious failures, others as evolving in useful new directions of benefit to society. The answers to these questions are not yet fully clear, but the impact of these movements are already evident, and so far few alternative parties have emerged to seriously rival the Islamists.

This book examines the broad phenomenon of Islamist movements across the Muslim world. I offer a number of hypotheses on the long-range future of Islamist

movements, both within the Muslim world and in the larger global context of competing ideas. This book does not represent an exercise in formal academic comparative politics. It is precisely the *differing* specific characteristics that spring from a unique time, place, history, set of leaders and personalities, and the ultimate conjuncture of all these factors that lend the spark of life, character, behavior, and reality to each of these movements. Generalizations, to be of value, must not strip off too many of these aspects of uniqueness, for they are what determine the difference, yet regrettably, in a book of this scope, the case studies that informed my views cannot find space.

I focus on what I believe to be the most interesting, distinctive, important, and revealing aspects of this phenomenon, hoping to uncover some general trends or useful insights from a net deliberately cast wide. For a single author to seek to write about Islamist politics across the whole Muslim world in one sense may be a little presumptuous or foolhardy. No one can be an expert on the details of the political orders of all of these countries. Yet a single author representing a single vision can perhaps bring greater synthesis to the material than a multiauthored volume can. That is at once this book's greatest strength and weakness. A dozen or more books by single authors coping with the totality of this same problem would be of great value to all of us.

The book makes no pretense of "mastering the literature" on the topic—that would be nigh impossible—nor does it attempt to place itself within the corpus of academic writing on the topic. Such contributions are undoubtedly valuable, but that is not my contribution.

The book reflects not merely the examination of writings on Islam but a lot of personal experience living some fourteen years in five different countries in the Muslim world supplemented by visits to every single Muslim country (including the Muslim areas of the former Soviet Union and China), often repeatedly and for long periods. The one glaring lacuna in this book is the absence of treatment of sub-Saharan Africa, not due to any lack of interest but simply the result of limitations on time, energy, and finances. I know I am losing some critically important insights into alternative forms of Islamic practice as seen in Africa. Perhaps a later edition might rectify this serious omission.

I have also maintained a wealth of close personal friendships with Muslims almost all of my life as well as a great love of the languages, cultures, literature, foods, music, films and arts of the Muslim world. I believe culture is at least as revealing as is political science in understanding how societies function. As vice-chairman of the National Intelligence Council at the CIA in the 1980s I was responsible for long-range global forecasting, which sparked my interest in the challenge and an-



alytic benefits of looking speculatively into the future. The effort of looking into alternative futures is essentially the function of the historian: it involves examining the past and trying to identify those trends and realities that might be projected into the future in some form. This book does not, of course, represent a clear-cut, single “prediction” about the future of the Muslim world at all, but it does offer a number of hypotheses about how to think about the problem.

## MY “AGENDA”

I would like to offer a few words about what my “agenda” might be in writing this book, because from experience I know that others will attribute one to me in any case. My years as a CIA staff officer have predisposed many, especially in the developing world, to believe that “once an intelligence officer, always an intelligence officer,” even though I abandoned government service some fifteen years ago. More to the point, many foreigners believe that my views somehow represent CIA or U.S. government views of the issues. I wish they did. I would be delighted if my views on these topics had more impact on the White House, the State Department, the Pentagon, or any others in a policy role anywhere, but I am under no illusion that the views expressed here are especially congenial to current policy circles.

As an American I naturally care strongly about the future and welfare of my own country. At the same time I believe that America’s interests, conducted in an enlightened manner, need not differ radically from the interests of most Muslims. After many long years in the Muslim world I am also broadly concerned for the future and welfare of its peoples. This empathy should not render me uncritical of events, trends, or groups there. Nor is this book an apologia for the Muslim world, although a few may consider it so since it attempts to place Islamist politics in a rational light and suggests that not all Muslim grievances are groundless. Furthermore, there will be many Muslims who believe I am wrong in my understanding of their society or what constitutes their welfare. They may be right. But some element of empathy on the part of the analyst is essential if one is to understand the outlook and psychology of various forms of Islamists. Most Islamist views are far from crazy, marginalized, alien, or primitive at all, but quite rational within the context of local conditions and problems, even if these views are not always correct or successful.

I take most of the various missions of political Islam as worthy of serious consideration. In aspiring to apply Muslim values to the new modern democratic order. I am willing to hear out the Islamists—at least initially—and to try to see the world through their eyes in line with their aspirations rather than impose some

preconceived body of Western notions as the basis of judgment. I do not reject out of hand their experiment, even if I personally have some serious reservations about their chances of success. A willingness to listen to them sympathetically in no way excludes the right to criticize their record to date, to point out their failures and problems they face. Will these movements in fact be able to answer many of the major needs of Muslim societies of the future? I believe they should be afforded the opportunity to express their views, to articulate their programs, and to try to implement many of their ideas as long as they do not violate basic norms of contemporary international society. Indeed many have already violated several basic norms of international society, but in this they are joined by large numbers of other non-Muslim movements, parties, and regimes in the developing world. Some have already failed miserably and deserve outright condemnation, such as the Taleban in Afghanistan and indiscriminately violent groups like Islamic Jihad in Egypt, the GIA in Algeria, and above all the murderous al-Qa'ida—organizations that have made no political contribution other than to spill blood and polarize cultures.

Other Islamist movements are still evolving and deserve watching. Many of them can be excluded from the political process in the Muslim world only at high political cost since their roots are deep and linked to Islamic culture. They speak to problems and grievances that seek a vehicle of expression and that call for a program of action. They will not go away. Islamism happens to be the most current of those vehicles. The ultimate challenge is how to seek ways in which political integration of Islamism into the current political orders might be possible. Where movements are evolving, even out of unsuccessful or unwise early beginnings, they need to be given a chance to prove—or disprove—themselves until the world has a better sense about where they are going. I do not believe that the majority of Islamist movements by definition represent a dangerous and noxious ideology that must be repressed. A few by their actions do. But to stifle them all across the board today will only invite heightened confrontation and instability across the Muslim world.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The first chapter of the book discusses the “anguish” of Islamic history, nostalgia for what Muslims see as a glorious past of power and civilizational accomplishment, followed by a period of severe decline into backwardness and even marginalization. What went wrong, why, and what are the implications for future action? I also examine the trajectory of Islamic history through the last century to indicate its remarkable evolution and possible directions of change.

Chapter two is entitled “The Uses of Political Islam,” suggesting the multiple roles that political Islam plays today across diverse societies. Not all of these roles are obvious to most Western observers. It is these multiple roles that also serve to guarantee political Islam a central role in Muslim world politics for some time to come.

Chapter three discusses “Islamic polarities”—how might we categorize Islamist movements in a few respects—particularly in terms of the two poles of radical/fundamentalist Islamism versus modernist or “liberal” Islamism.

Chapter four places Islam in the context of global politics. I contend that political Islam in no way represents an exotic aberration in world politics but rather bears close resemblance to most of the mainstream political movements and debates today across the developing world.

Chapter five discusses Islamism and terrorism and ways to think about the relationship between the two.

Chapter six looks at “Islamism in Power”—the cases of Iran, Sudan, and Afghanistan and a brief summary of their experiences to date. How does one assess their success or failure, who is the judge of this performance, and how is it affected by international politics?

Chapter seven focuses upon the behavior of Islamism as it operates in democratic and quasi-democratic orders. I argue that Islamist movements increasingly accept the “universality” of democracy, seek to become part of the democratic order, and believe that they will benefit from this kind of political order. As they become integrated into the system, they lose much of their ideological fervor and take on the characteristics of “normal” political parties. But this liberalizing trend is not universal, and there are some disturbing countertrends and genuine problems that these movements face in accommodating themselves to the philosophy of democratic governance.

Chapter eight looks at the problem of “Islam and the West”—a key determinant of the future of Islamist movements. Are we talking about a “clash of civilizations”? What are the concrete factors that drive this relationship? I suggest that Islam operates more as a vehicle of conflict rather than serving as the source of that conflict.

Chapter nine discusses the key determinative factors, domestic and international, that will influence the future of political Islam.

Chapter ten concludes with an examination of the future of Islamism, alternative paths of development for it, and the key problems these movements face.

# THE ANGUISH OF ISLAMIC HISTORY

## THE ANGUISH OF HISTORY'S REVERSAL

The deepest underlying source of Muslim anguish and frustration today lies in the dramatic decline of the Muslim world, in over just a few centuries, from the leading civilization in the world for over one thousand years into a lagging, impotent, and marginalized region of the world. This stunning reversal of fortune obsessively shapes the impulses underlying much contemporary Islamist rhetoric. As Israeli scholar Martin Kramer tells us:

“In the year 1000, the Middle East was the crucible of world civilization. One could not lay a claim to true learning if one did not know Arabic . . . An Islamic empire, established by conquest four centuries earlier, had spawned an Islamic civilization, maintained by the free will of the world’s most creative and enterprising spirits. . . . [T]here could be no doubt that the dynasties of Islam represented the political, military, and economic superpowers of the day. . . . This supremely urbane civilization cultivated genius. Had there been Nobel prizes in 1000, they would have gone almost exclusively to Moslems.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet, this very glory has now become no more than a fabled memory mocking present Muslim impotence. It is an especially bitter taste in the mouth when viewed against the overwhelming contemporary dominance of Western civilization that once had lagged so far behind the Islamic. Muslims today are understandably lacerated by self-doubt in contemplating what has gone wrong; indeed, for some it is tantamount to a fall from the grace of God.

The force of this perceived historical cataclysm and Muslims’ subsequent impotence in the face of the West constitutes a key psychological reality of political Islam today. It provides vital impetus for Islamists who seek to recreate—so far

without success—the edifice of past glory through drawing more deeply on the reservoirs of Islam to create a more powerful Islamic civilization. Indeed, for many Muslims, the present era of Muslim impotence, seen in the perspective of the long march of history, may be no more than an distressing historic interlude, after which the Muslim world may once again reassert its powerful place in the international order. But how do Muslims get there?

## LEGACY OF A BRILLIANT PAST

The Muslim world has been more resistant to the inroads of a Western-dominated political and cultural order than any other civilization in the world, including China or India. Yet, viewed positively, this reality speaks for the strength and functionality of historical Islamic civilization over long periods. Indeed, no other culture in the history of the world can speak of a continuous high civilization for as long a period of time and covering as geographically diverse and vast a region of the world. This civilization formed the heart of the world order far longer than Western civilization has, and over a far broader region. How could Muslims not therefore think of themselves as perhaps the preeminent world civilization—even if temporarily lapsed?

But the negative aspect of this power of resistance of Islamic civilization is that Muslims were unprepared for a shift in the balance of power and creativity away from them starting sometime around the fifteenth century. Yet evidence of revolutionary change afoot in the Western world lay before Muslim eyes, requiring the urgent recognition that Muslim societies had somehow begun to founder. Indeed, it is one of the arrogances of any advanced and secure civilization, as Chinese, Indian, and Muslim history demonstrate, to be unable to believe that external barbarians can have anything serious to offer. (Should we note our contemporary Western certitude that the present Western order represents the final model of history and that there is has nothing left to learn from others?) Equally painful for Muslims, over the past several hundred years the West has continuously reinforced the message, both explicitly and implicitly, that it now offers a superior civilizational product. Indeed, the current backwardness of Muslim societies is a fact recognized by all, including Muslims.

Thus *many Muslims attribute the past achievements and durability of Islamic civilization to the very message and implementation of Islam itself. Logically then, any apparent straying from that faith might be perceived as a direct source of decline and failure.* This perception is one key generating principle behind most Islamist reformist movements of the past, including that of political Islam today.

The alternative model, imposed by Western colonialism, divided much of the Muslim world into so-called nation-states that were not in reality based on true “nations” at all as ethnically based European states were. The Arab world in particular was “artificially” divided into units that are perceived by Arabs as neither traditional, logical, useful, or successful. On the contrary, this Western principle of reorganization—based on divisive ethnicity rather than moral principles of Muslim unity—is perceived as a key source of contemporary Muslim weakness that only a move toward Islamic unity can overcome—even if creation of just one single pan-Islamic state is not realistic.

## THE SOURCES OF ISLAMIC SUCCESS

To Muslims, it is self-evident that Islamic civilization created a system of belief, governance, and social order that withstood the tests of over a thousand years of history and across a vast variety of regions, cultures, and peoples. For many Muslims there is no need to speculate about Islam’s success here; its strength lies in the very fact that it is the message of God as revealed to the last of God’s prophets, Muhammad. To many Muslims for whom Islam supplies deep sustenance, support, and guidance, nothing more about Islam’s demonstrative success needs to be explained. Even an agnostic cannot deny the power of this religious idea as evidenced in Islamic history.

Even from a Western perspective, the roots of any civilization must be grounded in a functional body of ethical and legal principles and practices that enjoy broad acceptance and legitimacy. Throughout most of human history religion has been a key source of those principles. The spiritual inspiration of Islam and its vision of society and the state obviously explains much about its permanent acceptance by such diverse cultures and peoples over so long an expanse of time. How else (in Muslim eyes) could one explain the success of a small, geographically isolated region of the Arabian Peninsula, heavily marked by tribal bedouin culture, in producing a religious and organizational idea capable of spreading quickly not only to the rest of the Semitic world but far beyond, crossing geographic, linguistic, and cultural barriers from Morocco to Indonesia?

Indeed, it is not just the conquest but its very durability that is also striking; it did not melt away in a generation or two, as did Mongol power. Vast numbers of adherents of different religious cultures—Christian Byzantium, Zoroastrian Persia, Buddhist Central Asia, large parts of the Hindu subcontinent, Hindu/Buddhist Java, and animist Africa—after the Muslim conquest ended up permanently accepting the spiritual, ethical, and legal principles of Islam. Traders and Sufi mystics

were at least as important in laying the groundwork for the acceptance of the institutions of Islam as were armies. This body of ethical belief was neither so culture-bound to the Arabian Peninsula nor so complex and unique as to be unadaptable to the cultural conditions of African savannas, temperate forests, mountain peoples, riverine cultures, jungle regions, and high deserts—down to today. Rarely in history has any Muslim culture been supplanted, by whatever means, by some other religious culture. Indeed, as Ali Mazru'i points out, there has not been a single prophet since the Prophet Muhammad who has succeeded in establishing a divine or moral message that has taken over even one country.<sup>2</sup> Whatever Westerners may think about Islam, we cannot ignore the reality that in a political and social sense, Islam has in fact prevailed more widely, longer, and over more diverse cultures than any other religion. Surely this fact bespeaks a formidable cultural power, an ability to meet social, ethical, and moral needs of diverse societies for long periods of time under differing historical and regional conditions. The key question is whether Islam can continue to meet that challenge today especially as *all religious tradition* comes under assault in the face of evolutionary global forces.

## WHAT WENT WRONG?

For Islamists the internal moral and spiritual decline of Muslim societies is the primary source of the problem. But even this argument raises further complex issues. What is it that Islam provided that has been lost? Precisely what element of a straying from Islam was most responsible for that subsequent decline? Lack of rightly guided—that is, good—leadership? Poor governance? Withering of just societies? Loss of moral values by the masses of the population? Weakness stemming from loss of direction? Even if these failures are acknowledged, specifically what mistakes were committed? Does it simply boil down to non-observance of the Shari'a (Islamic law)? Or a broader loss of faith (*Iman*)? Even less clear is how to address these things. Exactly what is it that Muslims must return to in order to once again achieve past levels of civilizational power? Surely more is involved than just application of Islamic law and establishment of selected Islamic governmental institutions. The Qur'an offers few clues about even what kind of specific governmental institutions are required. Indeed, we are now engaged here in *analysis of the qualities of good governance in general*, with or without reference to Islam. Here is where Islamists must decide how ultimately to determine the specific requirements for a demonstrable Islamic renaissance.

Of course even Islamists recognize that the decline of Islamic civilization cannot be attributed strictly to moral causation. Most Muslim and Western observers

alike would note at least a few other causal factors at work that need to be acknowledged if Islamic decline is to be righted.

## CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL FACTORS

Islam brought massive intellectual change to the regions into which it spread, increasing communications and encouraging the study of the universe as a means of understanding God and all his works. In a sense, Islam was proto-globalization. It was the waning of this universalist tradition that led to localization and atrophy of what was once an open and searching intellectual society.

The death of Islamic intellectual vigor and curiosity—an exhaustion of civilizational *élan* without dramatic new intellectual input—led to the decline of creative thinking in Islamic theology, philosophy, science, and technology. Ritual replaced thought and inquiry in what passed for study of Islam. Analysis grew narrow and unchallenging. Thinking ossified over time, forbidding even the kind of historical scrutiny of Islam's own texts and sources of authority that was possible in earlier centuries. This atrophy of Muslim intellectual vigor was well demonstrated in the collapse of Muslim sciences and even a general passivity toward later scientific and technological development in the West—until that same technology overwhelmed the Muslim world. Even in the face of the West's challenge, most reformers looked at the West primarily as a warehouse of technological hardware, without grasping the need for the all-important civilizational software or values that made it all function.

## GEOPOLITICAL FACTORS

External factors alike contributed to the decline of the Muslim world. The Mongol conquests destroyed a number of the great Muslim urban centers of the world, along with their libraries and populations, which never quite recovered. The emergence of a Shi'ite state in Iran at the start of the sixteenth century physically divided the Sunni Muslim world, erecting a barrier to communications among Muslims across Eurasia. The shift of commerce from a Eurasian land-based Silk Route to a seafaring one left much of the Muslim world in isolation. Europe began to develop maritime trade into the Atlantic with the "discovery" of the New World, opening a new chapter in global history that enriched the Europeans and largely marginalized the role of Muslim seafarers who had once dominated Asian trade. And colonialism hobbled the development of Muslim states across the globe, destroying traditional institutions and failing to provide



functional organic alternatives. Muslim societies today are still concerned with external domination, even if that domination no longer takes classic colonial shape.

## CYCLICAL FACTORS

To some extent the Muslim decline has been absolute when measured against its own previous vigor and creativity. But Muslims also measure their own current dismal state against the meteoric rise of the West over the past few centuries. It is not only that the Muslim world declined but that the West itself developed a remarkable dynamism for complex historical reasons of its own, building on a solid foundation of preceding cultural attainments in the world, many of which were Muslim. Much of today's debate is about whether Islam can or should recreate for itself those key conditions that enabled the West to flower after the Renaissance, or whether those factors are unique to Western conditions and cannot simply be transplanted to the Muslim world.

## ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Finally, important environmental cycles can also be adduced that are linked to concepts of cyclical change. Jared Diamond has suggested that the Fertile Crescent, a cradle of civilization for a variety of environmental reasons, essentially began to fail as deforestation, desiccation, and subsequent diminution of natural and animal resources gradually caused the region to lose its cutting edge and cede its own civilizational power ultimately to Western Europe. He argues that as power gradually shifted West each successive civilization was able to build on the civilizational base of the previous one—scientific and technical, linguistic, artistic, artisanal, and agricultural, enabling the West to benefit from them all. Thus while Western Europe contributed little to world civilization until the late Middle Ages, its climate of fertile land and prolific flora and fauna coupled with new civilizational energy was the primary source for the eventual emergence of a new and powerful West European civilization, one built on the successes and knowledge of past societies whose environments were no longer as productive.<sup>3</sup>

Jeffrey Sachs at the Harvard University Center for International Development also points out the impact of climatic and ecological shifts: while Europe possessed a temperate climate, the Middle East was generally marked by growing aridity: "By 1900, at the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Europe had coal, hydropower, timber, and iron ore. The Islamic countries had few stocks of these nineteenth-

century necessities for industrialization. The oil fields were discovered and exploited only after the Europeans had seized colonial control.” In 800 A.D. the Middle East and Western Europe both had populations of around 30 million each. The Middle East had thirteen cities with populations over 50,000 while Europe had only one—Rome. But by 1600 the balance had shifted dramatically due to these conditions, as well as technological innovations stemming from new vitality.<sup>4</sup>

The Islamist task, then, is to correctly understand and to right this distressing trajectory of Islamic civilization. As Sachs points out, this must not be taken as a morality tale but as a problem in comparative development. Yet even comparative development must integrate intellectual, psychological, and cultural factors as well as economic and political issues. The great challenge for Muslims, then, is about how specifically to recover past achievements, establish a flourishing and advanced Islamic society, and redress the current imbalance of power between the Muslim world and the West. How much of this resurgence is dependent upon moral concepts and how much on the more complex and tedious elaboration through trial and error of the institutions of good governance? Most Islamists would agree that simply more personal religiosity is not a sufficient answer, but they would disagree on the means by which just and good governance is achieved.

## THE TRAJECTORY OF ISLAMIC CHANGE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

But Islamic history even during the past century has not been simply one of backwater isolation or stagnant languish. The reality is that the Muslim world has been on a breathtaking roller-coaster ride across a tumultuous century. This trajectory of political Islam offers signs—many of them contradictory—of genuine evolution in directions that include greater realism, political development, and an ability to learn from experience and reality. It also offers some negative indicators as well.

Political Islam in all its forms represents the uncertain beginnings of a vital process in which Islamic thinking comes to terms with multiple aspects of Western political thinking and institutions, expanding the range of its own outlook and activities—in both disturbing and heartening ways. The process in historical terms remains nascent, but it represents nothing less than the beginning of an intellectual reformation in Islamic thought.

The first series of body blows to the Muslim world in the nineteenth century was delivered by the West. The dawn of the twentieth century began with deep Muslim anxieties over the catastrophic weakness of the Muslim world, generating such thinkers as Jamal-al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad ‘Abdu, Rashid Ridha, and

Said Nursi Bediüzzaman, who sought ways to reverse this course of Muslim decline through examination of weaknesses in Islamic intellectual practice itself. A list of the dramatic and seminal events is imposing.

- The greatest Muslim Empire in history, the Ottoman Empire, underwent final collapse.
- Out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire a series of new, nominally independent Muslim states were established by the Western imperial order across the Arab world, many of which were perceived as arbitrary and artificial.
- Western colonial powers asserted direct imperial control over virtually every one of these new Arab states except Saudi Arabia for a period that would last past mid-century.
- The central institution of Islam, the Caliphate, was abolished by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the modern secular state of Turkey.
- Large segments of the Muslim world were dragged involuntarily into two world wars.
- Most of the Muslim world finally attained genuine independence, but only after World War II.
- The state of Israel was established within the Muslim world with incalculable regional impact that has not yet subsided.
- The Muslim world was broadly exposed to the extremes of European political ideology, which included socialism, Marxism, communism and fascism, all of which were implemented in one state or another. These ideologies brought new intellectual and ideological breadth and sophistication to debates between communists, secular nationalists, and Islamists that were unprecedented. It also brought strong fascist elements into the thinking of much of Arab nationalism from which it has not yet fully escaped.
- The Cold War dragged the Muslim world into highly divisive geopolitical equations, polarizing the Arab world. The West began to view the politics of the Muslim world nearly exclusively through the spectrum of its East-West implications. But the Muslim world also learned to play the West off against the Soviet Union, expanding its own room for maneuver and gaining benefits from each side. Muslim states grew accustomed to operating within a clear bipolar world.
- Despite all the forces for change, large parts of the Muslim world, to varying degrees, fell under the hand of autocracy and the police state, both in the form of monarchies and, even worse, in harsh post-monarchical “republican”

regimes ruled by presidents-for-life. The degree of state control over the daily lives of Muslims is unprecedented in Muslim history.

- The Western discovery of oil and demand for energy created unprecedented new wealth in some parts of the Muslim world. While oil has enriched a number of countries, it has also served to freeze the organic development of their economies and generally failed to create productive sectors independent of state collection of various kinds of “rents” and “unearned” income from oil.
- The Levant states of the Arab world—Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt—were defeated three times by Israel in major wars, and Lebanon and Syria were humbled in briefer invasions, occupations, or attacks as part of losing geopolitical skirmishes between them.
- The Muslim world has been attacked at least six times in the last forty-five years—sometimes with devastating results—by Western military forces, mostly American.
- The forces of globalization, especially since the end of the Cold War, have exerted major impact upon traditional Muslim culture and beliefs, lives, and interstate relations. The cultural impact of the West became overwhelming with the spread of information technology and the experience of millions of Muslims gaining advanced degrees in the West.

But the region has not remained strictly the passive object of modernization and revolutionary change. It has responded with new developments in the ideological and social arenas of the Muslim world itself, directly linked to political Islam and its future. Among them:

- Hasan al-Banna in the 1950s in Egypt established a political movement calling for the first time the concept of an “Islamic state.”
- In 1948 Pakistan became the first modern state, carved out of India, to be created strictly on the grounds of the Muslim character of its population.
- Mawlana Abu'l A'la al-Mawdudi in Pakistan then established the first actual political party based on Islamism, marking the formal entry of Islamic thought into modern politics with the goal of establishing an Islamic state.
- The Muslim world was drawn into the broader politics of the Third World and joined a non-aligned movement that expanded its international alliances and shared concepts of Third World ideology on a global order.
- The Gulf oil states achieved a powerful global voice over international energy and economic issues as a result of a meteoric rise of the price of oil in the 1970s.

- Beginning in the 1970s Islamist movements proliferated across the entire Muslim world, in a range of forms of differing degrees of legal status within their respective political orders.
- The Iranian revolution in 1979 established the first Islamist state in history, a modern concept for which there is no precedent, raising an array of questions about what an Islamic state is actually supposed to be. Islamist states in Sudan and Afghanistan followed suit in subsequent years.
- The *jihad* (struggle, or holy war) against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan marked what many Islamists term the “first defeat of a superpower through armed Islamic struggle,” an event that has had major impact upon the ideology, methods and cadres of political Islam in its struggle against perceived oppression, both foreign and domestic.
- Islam has come to provide much of the essential vocabulary for domestic struggle against tyranny in the Muslim world.
- Political Islam has readily embraced technology for the propagation of its ideas, including astonishingly wide participation on the Internet featuring provocative new debate on a global basis; an “electronic *umma*” (Muslim religious community) has created a deeper sense of international Islamic awareness and solidarity.
- Terrorism as a political tool used by certain radical Islamist groups achieved new global salience because of its effectiveness as an instrument by weak groups and states in resisting Western power. Powerful and effective use of terror has been applied against domestic or foreign enemies in such countries as Algeria, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Pakistan, India, Iran, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Yemen, Chechnya, and Uzbekistan. Terrorism against the United States engendered a global American War Against Terrorism with as yet unknown geopolitical repercussions.
- Terrorism in the name of Islam and the U.S. response has deepened popular acceptance of a “clash of civilizations.”
- In Pakistan in 1999 the Muslim world gained its first nuclear weapon. At the same time other Muslim states (Iraq and Iran) began to develop strategic weapons programs that could seriously hinder Western military monopoly of power in the Middle East and perhaps change the regional calculus of power.
- Islamist movements, to the extent permitted, have moved into the democratic political arena in Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Yemen, Jordan, Palestine, Turkey, Bosnia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sudan, Iran, Lebanon, and Kuwait. Islamists have fared well in elections in Turkey, Yemen, Jordan, Algeria, Kuwait, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Participation in the demo-

cratic order now includes several fundamentalist (back to quite literally defined basic principles) movements that earlier quite denied the validity of democracy in Islam but that have been unable to afford remaining outside the political game and its rules. Political Islam in Iran has undergone the broadest philosophical and conceptual debate and evolution of any Muslim state in the world.

- Large *da'wa* (reformist missionary) movements are underway in the form of the Nur movement in Turkey and the Tablighi Jama'at in South Asia and elsewhere that are affecting the tone of Islamic society, increasing awareness of the importance of Islam to individual as well as social life.
- The Western world has been forced to come to terms with the character of political Islam as a key reality.
- For the first time, an Islamist government was overthrown by an external force with the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 that eliminated the Taleban.
- For the first time in Muslim history an Islamist party won a free national election in 2002 and took over the government—in Turkey.
- Islam has established itself in the West as a social and political force that is growing and beginning to exert powerful influence back in their homelands. The most advanced and unfettered thinking about Islam in the world is now taking place in the West.
- Politics in the Muslim world, including most Islamist movements and parties have essentially accepted the Western *vocabulary* of politics and its inherent values (democracy, human rights, pluralism, liberalization of the economy) even where sometimes those ideals are not really honored in practice by any parties in those political cultures. A handful of extremist fundamentalist movements continues to reject the entire Western framework of political values but in doing so it faces either marginalization or radicalization. The concept of human rights has taken on new salience in most Islamist movements because the concept so directly affects them.
- The spectrum and diversity of Islamist movements are increasing—even within one country—especially in the absence of other political movements.

It is hard to imagine a century that could contain more change of similar breadth, depth, and scope for the Muslim world since the initial spread of Islam across Asia and North Africa. These changes are probably more dramatic and comprehensive than at any time since the third century of Islam's existence. Some developments have been positive, others negative.

Martin Kramer, on the other hand, looking at the Muslim world across the twentieth century contends that “[W]hile the twentieth century has been the stage of numerous ‘revolutions’ in the name of the people or the nation or Islam, it could well be argued that Muslims have failed to resolve issues which appeared on their agenda [even] a century ago.”<sup>5</sup> Kramer is quite right that the Muslim world has not resolved a whole set of key problems well known to any observer of the region. But where else, for that matter, has genuine “resolution” of key troubling issues actually occurred in most of the rest of the developing world, including China, India, Latin America, Africa, and Russia? Where have democracy, prosperity, genuine stability, good governance, literacy, and health triumphed in the globe except in the West and a handful of other countries mainly in East Asia? It is clearly incorrect to suggest that political Islam and the Muslim world have not gone anywhere in the last century beyond a lot of noise and heat. Indeed, the list of important changes I cite above represents a dramatic evolution—some of it admittedly negative—even if it does not necessarily involve “resolution” of problems. This evolution sets the indispensable groundwork for the possibility of greater movement toward “resolution” of political problems in this next century.

One encouraging indicator is the effect of time and generational change. We are already witnessing signs of an early shift toward greater openness, accessibility, and flexibility on the part of new leadership in several states—Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Bahrain, Syria—and a great deal more change should come as multiple presidents-for-life and aged monarchs depart the scene, peacefully or violently. Even where the change is not dramatic, it is perceptible and newer rulers can’t quite get away with what the old ones did. Generational change, of course, occurs not only among rulers but at the level of citizenry as well—new generations who have been socialized into both Islam and western democratic ideas, at least from afar, and many millions more educated in the West—all now regularly exposed to international media and the events of the world. They are increasingly seeking to reconcile, meld, and integrate into new forms of political discourse and practice.

It will not be business as usual in the Muslim world in the coming decades. But how do Islamists actually function in this world? Are Muslim concerns markedly different, bound to a unique cultural world? Or are Islamists actually participating in the broader issues of the developing world? We will examine that issue in the next chapter.