

# Civil Democratic Islam

Partners, Resources,  
and Strategies

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The Islamic world is involved in a struggle to determine its own nature and values, with serious implications for the future. What role can the rest of the world, threatened and affected as it is by this struggle, play in bringing about a more peaceful and positive outcome?

Devising a judicious approach requires a finely grained understanding of the ongoing ideological struggle within Islam, to identify appropriate partners and set realistic goals and means to encourage its evolution in a positive way.

The United States has three goals in regard to politicized Islam. First, it wants to prevent the spread of extremism and violence. Second, in doing so, it needs to avoid the impression that the United States is “opposed to Islam.” And third, in the longer run, it must find ways to help address the deeper economic, social, and political causes feeding Islamic radicalism and to encourage a move toward development and democratization.

The debates and conflicts that mark the current Islamic world can make the picture seem confusing. It becomes easier to sort the actors if one thinks of them not as belonging to distinct categories but as falling along a **spectrum**. Their views on certain critical **marker issues** help to locate them correctly on this spectrum.

It is then possible to see which part of the spectrum is generally compatible with our values, and which is fundamentally inimical. On this basis, this report identifies components of a specific strategy.

This report should be of interest to scholars, policymakers, students, and all others interested in the Middle East, Islam, and political Islam.

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There is no question that contemporary Islam is in a volatile state, engaged in an internal and external struggle over its values, its identity, and its place in the world. Rival versions are contending for spiritual and political dominance. This conflict has serious costs and economic, social, political, and security implications for the rest of the world. Consequently, the West is making an increased effort to come to terms with, to understand, and to influence the outcome of this struggle.

Clearly, the United States, the modern industrialized world, and indeed the international community as a whole would prefer an Islamic world that is compatible with the rest of the system: democratic, economically viable, politically stable, socially progressive, and follows the rules and norms of international conduct. They also want to prevent a “clash of civilizations” in all of its possible variants—from increased domestic unrest caused by conflicts between Muslim minorities and “native” populations in the West to increased militancy across the Muslim world and its consequences, instability and terrorism.

It therefore seems judicious to encourage the elements within the Islamic mix that are most compatible with global peace and the international community and that are friendly to democracy and modernity. However, correctly identifying these elements and finding the most suitable way to cooperate with them is not always easy.

Islam’s current crisis has two main components: a failure to thrive and a loss of connection to the global mainstream. The Islamic world has been marked by a long period of backwardness and comparative powerlessness; many different solutions, such as nationalism, pan-Arabism, Arab socialism, and Islamic revolution, have been attempted without success, and this has led to frustration and anger. At the same time, the Islamic world has fallen out of step with contemporary global culture, an uncomfortable situation for both sides.

Muslims disagree on what to do about this, and they disagree on what their society ultimately should look like. We can distinguish four essential positions:

- **Fundamentalists** reject democratic values and contemporary Western culture. They want an authoritarian, puritanical state that will implement their extreme view of Islamic law and morality. They are willing to use innovation and modern technology to achieve that goal.
- **Traditionalists** want a conservative society. They are suspicious of modernity, innovation, and change.
- **Modernists** want the Islamic world to become part of global modernity. They want to modernize and reform Islam to bring it into line with the age.
- **Secularists** want the Islamic world to accept a division of church and state in the manner of Western industrial democracies, with religion relegated to the private sphere.

These groups hold distinctly different positions on essential issues that have become contentious in the Islamic world today, including political and individual freedom, education, the status of women, criminal justice, the legitimacy of reform and change, and attitudes toward the West.

The **fundamentalists** are hostile to the West and to the United States in particular and are intent, to varying degrees, on damaging and destroying democratic modernity. Supporting them is not an option, except for transitory tactical considerations. The **traditionalists** generally hold more moderate views, but there are significant differences between different groups of traditionalists. Some are close to the fundamentalists. None wholeheartedly embraces modern democracy and the culture and values of modernity and, at best, can only make an uneasy peace with them.

The **modernists** and **secularists** are closest to the West in terms of values and policies. However, they are generally in a weaker position than the other groups, lacking powerful backing, financial resources, an effective infrastructure, and a public platform. The **secularists**, besides sometimes being unacceptable as allies on the basis of their broader ideological affiliation, also have trouble addressing the traditional sector of an Islamic audience.

Traditional orthodox Islam contains democratic elements that can be used to counter the repressive, authoritarian Islam of the fundamentalists, but it is not suited to be the primary vehicle of democratic Islam. That role falls to the Islamic modernists, whose effectiveness, however, has been limited by a number of constraints, which this report will explore.

To encourage positive change in the Islamic world toward greater democracy, modernity, and compatibility with the contemporary international world order, the United States and the West need to consider very carefully which elements, trends, and forces within Islam they intend to strengthen; what the goals and

values of their various potential allies and protégés really are; and what the broader consequences of advancing their respective agendas are likely to be. A mixed approach composed of the following elements is likely to be the most effective:

- **Support the modernists first:**
  - Publish and distribute their works at subsidized cost.
  - Encourage them to write for mass audiences and for youth.
  - Introduce their views into the curriculum of Islamic education.
  - Give them a public platform.
  - Make their opinions and judgments on fundamental questions of religious interpretation available to a mass audience in competition with those of the fundamentalists and traditionalists, who have Web sites, publishing houses, schools, institutes, and many other vehicles for disseminating their views.
  - Position secularism and modernism as a “counterculture” option for disaffected Islamic youth.
  - Facilitate and encourage an awareness of their pre- and non-Islamic history and culture, in the media and the curricula of relevant countries.
  - Assist in the development of independent civic organizations, to promote civic culture and provide a space for ordinary citizens to educate themselves about the political process and to articulate their views.
- **Support the traditionalists against the fundamentalists:**
  - Publicize traditionalist criticism of fundamentalist violence and extremism; encourage disagreements between traditionalists and fundamentalists.
  - Discourage alliances between traditionalists and fundamentalists.
  - Encourage cooperation between modernists and the traditionalists who are closer to the modernist end of the spectrum.
  - Where appropriate, educate the traditionalists to equip them better for debates against fundamentalists. Fundamentalists are often rhetorically superior, while traditionalists practice a politically inarticulate “folk Islam.” In such places as Central Asia, they may need to be educated and trained in orthodox Islam to be able to stand their ground.
  - Increase the presence and profile of modernists in traditionalist institutions.

- Discriminate between different sectors of traditionalism. Encourage those with a greater affinity to modernism, such as the Hanafi law school, versus others. Encourage them to issue religious opinions and popularize these to weaken the authority of backward Wahhabi-inspired religious rulings. This relates to funding: Wahhabi money goes to the support of the conservative Hanbali school. It also relates to knowledge: More-backward parts of the Muslim world are not aware of advances in the application and interpretation of Islamic law.
- Encourage the popularity and acceptance of Sufism.
- **Confront and oppose the fundamentalists:**
  - Challenge their interpretation of Islam and expose inaccuracies.
  - Reveal their linkages to illegal groups and activities.
  - Publicize the consequences of their violent acts.
  - Demonstrate their inability to rule, to achieve positive development of their countries and communities.
  - Address these messages especially to young people, to pious traditionalist populations, to Muslim minorities in the West, and to women.
  - Avoid showing respect or admiration for the violent feats of fundamentalist extremists and terrorists. Cast them as disturbed and cowardly, not as evil heroes.
  - Encourage journalists to investigate issues of corruption, hypocrisy, and immorality in fundamentalist and terrorist circles.
  - Encourage divisions among fundamentalists.
- **Selectively support secularists:**
  - Encourage recognition of fundamentalism as a shared enemy, discourage secularist alliance with anti-U.S. forces on such grounds as nationalism and leftist ideology.
  - Support the idea that religion and the state can be separate in Islam too and that this does not endanger the faith but, in fact, may strengthen it.

Whichever approach or mix of approaches is chosen, we recommend that it be done with careful deliberation, in knowledge of the symbolic weight of certain issues; the meaning likely to be assigned to the alignment of U.S. policymakers with particular positions on these issues; the consequences of these alignments for other Islamic actors, including the risk of endangering or discrediting the very groups and people we are seeking to help; and the opportunity costs and possible unintended consequences of affiliations and postures that may seem appropriate in the short term.



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**MAPPING THE ISSUES: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE  
RANGE OF THOUGHT IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAM**

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The notion that the outside world should try to encourage a moderate, democratic interpretation and presentation of Islam has been in circulation for some decades but gained great urgency after September 11, 2001.

There is broad agreement that this is a constructive approach. Islam is an important religion with enormous political and societal influence; it inspires a variety of ideologies and political actions, some of which are dangerous to global stability; and it therefore seems sensible to foster the strains within it that call for a more moderate, democratic, peaceful, and tolerant social order. The question is how best to do this. This report identifies a direction.

We begin by setting the scene for the main ideological fissures in the discussion over Islam and society. The second chapter analyzes the pros and cons of supporting different elements within Islam. The final chapter proposes a strategy.

Immediately following September 11, 2001, political leaders and policymakers in the West began to issue statements affirming their conviction that Islam was not to blame for what had happened, that Islam was a positive force in the world, a religion of peace and tolerance. They spoke in mosques, held widely publicized meetings with Muslim clerics, invited mullahs to open public events, and inserted Quranic suras into their own speeches.

In a typical formulation, for example, President Bush asserted that “Islam is a faith that brings comfort to a billion people around the world” and that “has made brothers and sisters of every race. It’s a faith based upon love, not hate” (Bush, 2002).

This approach has not been unique to the United States but is also prevalent in Europe, where it led some commentators to note sarcastically that the political leadership “collectively appears to have acquired an instant postgraduate degree in Islamic studies, enabling them to lecture the population concerning the true nature of Islam” (Heitmeyer, 2001).

In part, this demonstrative public embracing of Islam by opinion leaders and politicians had a domestic rationale: Western leaders were attempting to pre-

vent a backlash that might have inspired acts of violence and hostility aimed at their respective Muslim minorities. In addition, there were at least two foreign policy motivations, one short term and the other longer term. In the short run, the goal was to make it politically possible for Muslim governments to support the effort against terrorism by detaching the issue of terrorism from the issue of Islam. In the longer run, the Western leaders were attempting to create an image, a vision, that would facilitate the better integration of Islamic political actors and states into the modern international system.

The academic community quickly joined in, trying to make the case that Islam was at a minimum compatible with, if indeed it did not demand, moderation, tolerance, diversity, and democracy. In his introduction to Abdulaziz Sachedina's *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, Joseph Montville expresses the purpose of such studies and the motivation of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in funding this one,

We knew that, like every great world religion, Islam embraced certain universal human values that could be recognized and accepted as the basis of community by non-Muslims . . . Prof. Sachedina . . . knew he could highlight those parts of the Koran . . . that emphasized the dignity of the individual, freedom of conscience, and God's love for all creatures, People of the Book and even people without a book. (Sachedina, 2001, p. 1)

And the author himself explains,

This work undertakes to map some of the most important political concepts in Islam that advance better human relationships, both within and between nations. It aims at *uncovering* normative aspects of Muslim religious formulations and specifying their application in diverse cultures to suggest their critical relevance to the pluralistic world order of the 21st century. . . . The goal here is not to glorify the Muslim past but to remember it, retrace its path, interpret it, reconstruct it and make it relevant to the present. (Sachedina, 2001, p. 1; emphasis added)

However, even as one group of authors was seeking to “highlight” one set of values to be found in the Quran and tradition, other authors were successfully finding and energetically publicizing quite another set of values.

Even as liberal scholars within and outside the Muslim world were gathering intellectual arguments that supported liberal, tolerant Islam, the terrorists were making equal reference to Islam, asserting that their mission and methods were mandated directly by their religion. The celebratory tone taken in some Islamic communities following the attacks soberingly showed that this view was shared by a certain—and not a small—segment of the Muslim public. Even a year after the event, radical clerics meeting in London to celebrate the September 11 attacks averred in their press conference that these had been an exercise in “just retribution” and thus a proper Islamic act (Bowcott, 2002).

Western leaders and supportive governments in the Muslim world have tried hard to detach the terrorists' goals from Islam; the radicals are equally determined to keep the issues joined.<sup>1</sup>

For many Western opinion leaders, the goal of opposing terrorists, of preventing the conflict from turning into a "clash of religions," and of discrediting the radicals' interpretation of Islam, made it seem all the more advisable to support the more benign strains within Islam—but which ones, exactly, and with what concrete goal in mind? Identifying the elements that should be supported, choosing appropriate methods, and defining the goals of such support is difficult.

It is no easy matter to transform a major world religion. If "nation-building" is a daunting task, "religion-building" is immeasurably more perilous and complex. Islam is neither a homogeneous entity nor a simple system. Many extraneous issues and problems have become entangled with religion, and many of the political actors in the region deliberately seek to "Islamize" the debate in a way that they think will further their goals.

### THE SETTING: SHARED PROBLEMS, DIFFERENT ANSWERS

Islam's current crisis has two main components: The Islamic world has been marked by a long period of backwardness and comparative powerlessness; many different solutions, such as nationalism, pan-Arabism, Arab socialism, and Islamic revolution, have been attempted without success;<sup>2</sup> and this has led to frustration and anger. At the same time, the Islamic world has fallen out of step with contemporary global culture, as well as moving increasingly to the margins of the global economy.

Muslims disagree on what to do about this, on what has caused it, and on what their societies ultimately should look like. We can distinguish four essential positions, as the following paragraphs describe.

The **fundamentalists**<sup>3</sup> put forth an aggressive, expansionist version of Islam that does not shy away from violence. They want to gain political power and then to impose strict public observance of Islam, as they themselves define it, forcibly on as broad a population worldwide as possible. Their unit of reference

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<sup>1</sup>For example, in a speech on September 21, 2002, the head of Pakistan's fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami party, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, reiterated that the United States was the "worst enemy of Islam" and considered "Islam as the main hurdle in the way of achieving its ulterior motives in the world." The so-called alliance against terrorism was in reality an anti-Islamic struggle aimed at "eliminating Muslim countries from the globe."

<sup>2</sup>See, especially, Roy (1994); Tibi (1988); Ajami (1981); and Rejwan (1998).

<sup>3</sup>The term *Islamist* is being variously used by different authors to describe either the fundamentalists or the traditionalists. To avoid confusion, it will not be used in this report.

is not the nation-state or the ethnic group, but the Muslim community, the *ummah*; gaining control of particular Islamic countries can be a step on this path but is not the main goal.

We can distinguish two strands within fundamentalism. One, which is grounded in theology and tends to have some roots in one or another kind of religious establishment, we will refer to as the *scriptural fundamentalists*. On the Shi'a side, this group includes most of the Iranian revolutionaries and, as one Sunni manifestation, the Saudi-based Wahhabis. The Kaplan congregation, active among Western diaspora Turks and in Turkey, is another example.

The *radical fundamentalists*, the second strand, are much less concerned with the literal substance of Islam, with which they take considerable liberties either deliberately or because of ignorance of orthodox Islamic doctrine. They usually do not have any "institutional" religious affiliations but tend to be eclectic and autodidactic in their knowledge of Islam. Al Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, and a large number of other Islamic radical movements and diffuse groups worldwide belong to this category.

The fundamentalists do not merely approve of the Islamic practices of the past. More significantly, they expand on them, applying some of the more stringent rules more rigorously than the original Islamic community ever did, exercising an arbitrary selectivity that allows them to ignore or drop more egalitarian, progressive, tolerant aspects of the Quran and the sunnah, and inventing some new rules of their own. This is particularly true of the radical fundamentalists.

Not all fundamentalists embrace or even endorse terrorism, at least not the indiscriminate type of terrorism that targets civilians and often kills Muslims along with the "enemy," but fundamentalism as a whole is incompatible with the values of civil society and the Western vision of civilization, political order, and society.

The **traditionalists** are also divided into two distinct groups: conservative traditionalists and reformist traditionalists. The distinction is significant.

*Conservative traditionalists* believe that Islamic law and tradition ought to be rigorously and literally followed, and they see a role for the state and for the political authorities in encouraging or at least facilitating this. However, they do not generally favor violence and terrorism.

Historically, they have grown accustomed to operating under changing political circumstances, and this has led them to concentrate their efforts on the daily life of the society, where they try to have as much influence and control as they can, even when the government is not Islamic. In the social realm, their goal is to preserve orthodox norms and values and conservative behavior to the fullest extent possible. The temptations and the pace of modern life are seen as posing a major threat to this. Their posture is one of resistance to change.

Additionally, there are often important differences between conservative traditionalists who live in the Islamic world or in the Third World generally and those who live in the West. Being an essentially moderate position, traditionalism tends to be adaptive to its environment. Thus, conservative traditionalists who live in traditional societies are likely to accept practices that are prevalent in such societies, such as child marriage, and to be less educated and less able to distinguish local traditions and customs from actual Islamic doctrine. Those who live in the West have absorbed more-modern views on these issues and tend to be better educated and more linked to the transnational discourse on issues of orthodoxy.

*Reformist traditionalists* think that, to remain viable and attractive throughout the ages, Islam has to be prepared to make some concessions in the literal application of orthodoxy. They are prepared to discuss reforms and reinterpretations. Their posture is one of cautious adaptation to change, being flexible on the letter of the law to conserve the spirit of the law.

The **modernists** actively seek far-reaching changes to the current orthodox understanding and practice of Islam. They want to eliminate the harmful ballast of local and regional tradition that has, over the centuries, intertwined itself with Islam. They further believe in the historicity of Islam, i.e., that Islam as it was practiced in the days of the Prophet reflected eternal truths as well as historical circumstances that were appropriate to that time but are no longer valid. They think it is possible to identify an “essential core” of Islamic belief; further, they believe that this core will not only remain undamaged but in fact will be strengthened by changes, even very substantial changes, that reflect changing times, social conditions, and historical circumstances.

The things that modernists value and admire most about Islam tend to be quite different and more abstract than the things the fundamentalists and the traditionalists value. Their core values—the primacy of the individual conscience and a community based on social responsibility, equality, and freedom—are easily compatible with modern democratic norms.

The **secularists** believe that religion should be a private matter separate from politics and the state and that the main challenge lies in preventing transgressions in either direction. The state should not interfere in the individual exercise of religion, but equally, religious customs must be in conformity with the law of the land and with human rights. The Turkish Kemalists, who placed religion under the firm control of the state, represent the laicist model in Islam.

These positions should be thought of as representing segments on a continuum, rather than distinct categories. There are no clear boundaries between them, so that some traditionalists overlap with the fundamentalists; the most modernist of the traditionalists are almost modernists; and the most extreme modernists are similar to secularists.

Each of these outlined positions takes a characteristic stance on key issues of controversy in the contemporary Islamic debate. And their “rules of evidence” for defending these positions are also distinct, as sketched in Table 1 (starting on page 8).

In the contemporary Islamic struggle, “lifestyle” issues are the field on which the contending positions try to stake their claims and that they use to signal their control. Doctrine is territory and is being fought over. This explains the prominence of such issues in an ideological and political contest.

The utility of “mapping” the views of the various Islamic positions is that, on issues of doctrine and lifestyle, they adhere to fairly distinct and reliable platforms, which define their identity and serve as identifiers toward like-minded others—a kind of “passport.”

Thus, while it is possible for groups to dissimulate concerning their attitude to violence, to avoid prosecution and sanctions, it is not really possible for them to distort or deny their views on key value and lifestyle issues. These are what define them and attract new members.

Conservative traditionalists accept the correctness of past practices, even when they conflict with today’s norms and values, on the principle that the original Islamic community represents the absolute and eternal ideal, but they no longer necessarily attempt to reinstate all of the practices. Often, however, their reason for this is not that they would not like to do it, but that they assess it to be temporarily or permanently unrealistic to do so. Reformist traditionalists reinterpret, rebut, or evade practices that seem problematic in today’s world. Modernists see the same practices as part of a changing and changeable historical context; they do not regard the original Islamic community or the early years of Islam as something that one would necessarily wish to reproduce today. Secularists prohibit the practices that conflict with modern norms and laws and ignore the others as belonging to the private sphere of individuals.

Secularists do not concern themselves with what Islam might or might not require. Moderate secularists want the state to guarantee people’s right to practice their faith, while ensuring that religion remains a private matter and does not violate any standards of human rights or civil law. Radical secularists, including communists and laicists, oppose religion altogether.

Conservative traditionalists seek guidance from conventional Islamic sources: the Quran, the sunnah, Islamic law, fatwas, and the religious opinions of respected scholars. Reformist traditionalists use the same sources but tend to be more inventive and more aggressive in exploring alternative interpretations. They are aware of the conflicts between modernity and Islam and want to reduce them to keep Islam viable into the future. They seek to reinterpret tradi-

tional content, to find ways around the restrictions or rulings that trouble them or stand in the way of desired changes or that harm the image of Islam in the eyes of the rest of the world.

There are ironic similarities in the way radical fundamentalists and modernists approach the issue of change. In keeping with convention, they both refer to the Quran, sunnah, law, fatwas, and authorities (of course, choosing different selections from each). But ultimately, both positions are guided by their respective visions of the ideal Islamic society. Each feels authorized to define and interpret the individual rules and laws in keeping with that vision. Obviously, this gives them a lot more freedom to maneuver than the traditionalists have.

Fundamentalists have as their goal an ascetic, highly regimented, hierarchical society in which all members follow the requirements of Islamic ritual strictly, in which immorality is prevented by separating the sexes, which in turn is achieved by banishing women from the public domain, and in which life is visibly and constantly infused by religion. It is totalitarian in its negation of a private sphere, instead believing that it is the task of state authorities to compel the individual to adhere to proper Islamic behavior anywhere and everywhere. And ideally, it wants this system—which it believes to be the only rightful one—to expand until it controls the entire world and everyone is a Muslim.

Modernists envision a society in which individuals express their piety in a way each finds personally meaningful, decide most moral matters and lifestyle issues on the basis of their own consciences, seek to lead ethical lives out of inner conviction rather than external compulsion, and base their political system on principles of justice and equality. This system should coexist peacefully with other orders and religions. The modernists find concepts within Islamic orthodoxy that support the right of Muslims, as individuals and as communities, to make changes and revisions even to basic laws and texts.

When a question arises that is not covered in Islamic orthodox texts, or when it is but they do not like the answer, fundamentalists and modernists both refer instead to their ideal vision and then innovate a solution. Since innovation is not generally accepted in Islam, they both define it as something else.

Modernists speak of “faith-based objections” to specific aspects of Islam, of the “good of the community” as a value that overrides even the Quran, of “community consensus” (*ijma*) that legitimizes even radical change.<sup>4</sup>

Radical fundamentalists reclaim *ijtihad*, the controversial practice of interpretation, or refer mysteriously to “higher criteria.” No traditionalist would ever argue that orthodox content of the Quran or the hadith can be “technically

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<sup>4</sup>See, for example, El Fadl (2001).

**Table 1**  
**“Marker Issues” and the Major Ideological Positions in Islam**

	Radical Fundamentalists	Scriptural Fundamentalists	Conservative Traditionalists
Democracy	A wrongful creed. Sovereignty and the right to legislate belong to God alone.	Islam is a form of democracy. The West has no right to define what democracy should look like, and the Islamic form is superior because it rests on the only correct and perfect religion.	There is some room for democratic instruments in the interpretation of Islamic practice, in community life and in certain sectors of public life.
Human rights, individual liberties	Erroneous decadent concepts that lead to corruption. The full imposition of shari’a creates a good and just society.	Humans need guidance and control, but these must be reasonable and fair, as set down in sunnah and the Quran.	Islam, properly lived, provides the optimum setting for humans. Equality and freedom are wrong concepts; Islam instead gives everyone their due in accord with their station and nature.
Polygamy	Is permitted and there is nothing wrong with it. Superior to Western immorality and serial divorce.	Permitted as a way to enhance public and individual morality, but not for self-indulgence.	Permitted under certain circumstances, including when all wives are treated equally, as the Quran requires, and only if local law permits it. But monogamy is superior.
Islamic criminal penalties, including flogging, amputations, stoning for adultery	An excellent way to provide swift, deterrent justice.	Just and correct, but may have to be implemented with discretion as it is no longer quite in line with world public opinion and can thus be detrimental to the image of Islamic states.	Should be used if the country follows shari’a law, which Muslim countries ought to do. Severe shari’a punishment has good deterrent effect but was intended to be mitigated by mercy, forgiveness, rehabilitation efforts, and strict rules of evidence.



Table 1—Continued

Reformist Traditionalists	Modernists	Mainstream Secularists	Radical Secularists
Islam has at heart been democratic from its inception; the community of believers is sovereign, and even the earliest leaders were chosen by democratic means.	Islam contains democratic concepts that need to be brought to the forefront.	Democracy is primary; Islam must (and can) bring itself into line with it and with the separation of church and state.	Social justice is more important than democracy.
Properly interpreted and applied, Islam guarantees human rights and such liberties as are actually good for a person, not false ones that lead the person on a wrongful path.	Islam contains the basic concepts of human rights and individual freedom, including the freedom to do wrong.	Islam can attempt to guide the behavior of those who adhere to it, in their private lives, where they can give up some of their freedoms if they choose. However, in overall social and political life, human rights are paramount and universal.	Equality and justice are more important than individual liberties.
Permitted in societies that legally allow it, but it should be the exception, and the agreement of the first wife should be obtained. In general, monogamy is thought better, but a defensive traditionalist position shares the fundamentalist argument that polygamy is better than Western sexual anarchy.	Not permitted. An archaic practice, such as those found in other religions, that was considered less than ideal even at the time, and there is evidence that Muhammad was trying to abolish it.	Against modern laws and accepted practice; therefore, not permitted.	Not permitted, although some would also consider monogamy to be a hypocritical bourgeois concept.
Should not be used. The most severe punishments were never intended to be implemented except in very rare cases; they have been misapplied and misunderstood and often have no real Quranic basis.	Should not be used. These punishments are either archaic, in line with the common practice of their era but no longer appropriate, or they were wrongfully interpreted in the first place.	Not legal in most countries and not in keeping with international human rights or contemporary norms; therefore, cannot be applied.	Religion is a fallacy; therefore, religious laws can never be legitimate.

Table 1—Continued

	Radical Fundamentalists	Scriptural Fundamentalists	Conservative Traditionalists
Hijab	Women must wear Islamic garments, usually to cover all but the face and hands but, in some places, also to conceal the face and hands. In the diaspora, a headscarf is the acceptable minimum. It is society's job to make sure women adhere to this rule through persuasion, pressure, education, and coercion. Men must also conform visually, usually by wearing a beard and short hair.	Islamic covering is required for women and should be coercively enforced.	Hijab is preferable. It can be enforced by family, peer, and community pressure. Not all traditionalists agree that real coercion is also acceptable. Both genders should dress modestly. Traditionalists in conservative societies: Women should cover everything but the hands and face. Traditionalists in the West and in modern societies: The scarf and long clothing is enough.
Beating of wives	Allowed and useful to control behavior of women and to maintain hierarchy in the family.	The Quran allows it, but it is permissible only as a well-intentioned pedagogical intervention to correct the behavior of an errant wife for her own good and that of the family and society.	Same as scriptural fundamentalists.
Status of minorities	Tolerated, but they cannot practice their own religion or culture in any visible way. They are inferior, and thus it is acceptable to discriminate against them. It is best if they convert.	Tolerated, as long as they do not engage in missionary activities.	Tolerated and should be treated decently and allowed to practice their religions and cultures, unless they are contrary to Islamic morality and law.
Islamic state	An Islamic state should be global and supranational. It should guide all conduct, policing such things as prayer attendance, beard length, clothing. Any matter not explicitly covered by a rule requires the advice of a religious authority.	Islam is possible on the basis of individual states, although a supranational ummah remains the ideal.	An Islamic state is best, because people can then most fully exercise their religion. Next best is to live immersed in an Islamic community, doing as told by your elders, family, and the community's religious leaders.

Table 1—Continued

Reformist Traditionalists	Modernists	Mainstream Secularists	Radical Secularists
Women should dress modestly; the definition of that depends on where the traditionalist lives and ranges from all-but-face-and-hands to the scarf to no scarf, as long as the body is not provocatively displayed.	Islam does not require women to wear any sort of veil or head covering. There is no textual substantiation for such rules. It is up to the individual to decide what to wear. Women should not be held responsible for men's possible licentious thoughts, since the Quran clearly instructs men to "lower their gaze," i.e., not to stare salaciously at women, and vice versa.	Muslims can wear whatever they want, but public schools and professions where it would impinge on performance or the rights of others can, if they see fit, prohibit the wearing of hijab, scarves, etc.	Hijab is a symbol of backwardness, and women should not want to wear it, let alone be pressured or forced into doing so.
No longer allowed, and the religious basis for it is questionable anyway. The Quranic passage permitting it has been challenged, and many hadiths reflect Muhammad's disapproval of it.	Not allowed, based on incorrect religious interpretation, and clearly against the spirit of Islamic concept of marriage and gender relations.	Not allowed, because it is illegal, and against contemporary norms and human rights.	Reflects archaic notion of wives as property, and so is not allowed.
Tolerated, and they should be well treated, encouraged to practice their religions and cultures if possible, and should be engaged in dialogue.	Should be treated on equal footing.	Assimilation into secular society is best.	Most of these affiliations represent false consciousness.
An Islamic state is best. Barring that, individual religious studies are important, backed by support of a like-minded community and religious experts to give guidance.	Islam was not meant to be a state but a code and guiding philosophy for life. The individual holds ultimate responsibility for his or her behavior and decisions, in the context of an ever-changing, vibrant community of thinking and questioning rational individuals.	Islam is a religion and thus a private matter; the state has the obligation to allow it, but Muslims have the obligation to obey civil law and local custom and to adapt to the age in which they live.	Religion is a retrograde force in society and should be abolished.

Table 1—Continued

	Radical Fundamentalists	Scriptural Fundamentalists	Conservative Traditionalists
Public participation of women	There must be maximum separation of women from men. Women should be excluded from the public domain to the fullest extent possible.	Iranian style Shi'a fundamentalism: Women should play an active role in society and political life, but there must be strict segregation, and the highest offices in justice and government are reserved for men. Sunni: Governance is the domain of men. Women can be active in fields related to children and social matters.	Women are responsible for the family; if that is completely taken care of, they can be active in certain professions and in community and public life but in a subsidiary function.
Jihad	There are different levels of jihad, but armed struggle for the establishment of a universal and worldwide Islamic order is incumbent upon anyone physically capable of participating. This can take the form of classical warfare or of terrorism and insurgency.	The definition of jihad varies from person to person. For women, childbirth is a form of jihad. Jihad includes the struggle for personal spiritual betterment. For some groups under some circumstances, it includes armed struggle, including terrorism.	Jihad is primarily the struggle for personal moral betterment, but it encompasses war on behalf of Islam when necessary and appropriate.
Sources	The Quran, sunnah, charismatic leaders, radical authors, with all details subordinated to the broad vision of a rigorously pious, Islamic society.	The Quran, sunnah, Islamic philosophy, science, scholarly interpretation, and charismatic leaders.	The Quran, sunnah, local custom and tradition, and the opinions of local mullahs

Table 1—Continued

Reformist Traditionalists	Modernists	Mainstream Secularists	Radical Secularists
Women are responsible first for the family, which is a very important role, but they can also take part in economic and public and political life, where they bring an added ,female, perspective. They can hold high office as women did during Muhammad's time. In the view of some, this excludes the position of head of state.	Family and community are important in Islam, and both genders should take responsibility there. All professions and all types of public and political offices are open to women. This was the case in Muhammad's time, when women even fought in his army, were appointed by him to be judges, and even led men in prayer ,and is certainly the case today.	Discrimination is illegal; equal rights and opportunities are the desirable norm.	All forms of inequality should be eliminated.
Jihad is a struggle for personal moral betterment. Only in very exceptional circumstances, such as a life or death struggle for the survival of the faith when attacked, does it include the obligation to engage in "holy war."	Jihad is a symbolic term referring to personal spiritual development.	Jihad as holy war is a historical reference. In the contemporary world, it refers to spiritual development, but since it is liable to be misunderstood, it is better not to use the term.	Fighting wars on the grounds of religion and religious differences is completely archaic and wrong.
The Quran, sunnah, the guidance of a wide assortment of scholars (including secular philosophers), modern laws and ethical codes, and community consensus.	The Quran, sunnah, historical and contemporary philosophy, and modern laws and ethical codes, in an effort to understand the essential spirit of Islam in the context of the present age.	Civil law, international human rights, and the philosophical underpinnings of secularism.	Specific ideology of the group or movement.

defensible” but still be contrary to the “spirit of the Prophet’s tradition” and therefore may be abandoned.

The next section illustrates how the positions define their views on the key issues we have identified.

In terms of its public manifestation, the division between the contemporary positions in Islam plays itself out in regard to issues of lifestyle and values. In some ways, this is what marks it most clearly as a religion-based dispute: Distinctions that may appear relatively minor in the grand scheme of things take on enormous importance because they signify allegiance or nonallegiance, victory or stalemate. The obvious example is the “head scarf.” It is important for outside actors to keep this in mind.

When U.S. government agencies appear to endorse the head scarf, for example, considering this to be a minor matter of preference in dress code that cheaply enables them to signal tolerance, they are in fact unwittingly taking a major stand on a central, wildly contested symbolic issue. They are aligning themselves with the extreme end of the spectrum, with the fundamentalists and the conservative traditionalists, against the reformist traditionalists, the modernists, and the secularists.

## POSITIONS ON KEY ISSUES

### Democracy and Human Rights

Illustrations of the radical fundamentalist position on issues of political doctrine can readily be found in print and online in the publications of Hezbi-Islami and Hizb-ut-Tahrir, to name only two sources:

According to Hezbi-Islami, parliaments and other democratic institutions are

clear and obvious forms of disbelief, and of *shirk*, or setting up rivals to Allah (by ascribing legislative power to people) and an unforgivable sin, and a contradiction of the purpose of creation.<sup>5</sup>

The goal is to impose the correct order, that of Islam, over all others. According to Green (1994),

This is not a confrontation of civilizations, nor is it a clash of cultures. Islam does not oppose the West, or anyone else, because of revenge over past hostilities, out of a desire to restore injured pride or because of the desire to amass their wealth and lands. The fight is for one purpose only and that is to establish

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<sup>5</sup>Note that all our quotations from and citations of online materials reflect the content as it existed between January and September 2002. Some of these texts have been changed or modified since then, though not substantially.

the religion of Islam in its totality . . . . Jihad has three characteristics. The first stage is to acquire the correct creed and to remove from one's self all doubts and misconceptions . . . The second stage is . . . releasing the lands of the Muslims from the control of their enemies . . . The final stage is that of fighting in order to open the path for establishing Allah's rule in the land of the unbelievers.

Similarly, Hizb-ut-Tahrir describes itself as "a political party whose ideology is Islam, so politics is its work and Islam is its ideology . . . to restore the Khilafah [the Caliphate]" As concerns governance, "the constitution and canons must be Islamic," and it cannot be

republican. The republican system is based on the democratic system, which is a system of Kufr (disbelief) . . . In [the Islamic system] the sovereignty is for the Shari'a and not for the Ummah. The legislator is Allah. The Khaleefa only possesses the right to adopt rules for the constitution and canons from the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger. Therefore, it is not permitted to say that the system of Islam is a republican system or to talk of an Islamic republic . . . .<sup>6</sup>

## Polygamy

**Fundamentalists** accept polygamy. The Taliban reintroduced the practice in Afghanistan, where it had mostly fallen into disuse. Child marriage is often a corollary of polygamy, and it is prevalent in societies that fundamentalists control but also in some places conservative traditionalists control. The Taliban and Afghanistan-based al Qaeda also practiced forced marriages, which the Quran accepts in the context of war.

**Reformist traditionalists** and **conservative traditionalists** who live in the West or in countries that do not endorse this practice do not support the active practice of polygamy. Some of them disavow it only because they believe that Muslims must respect the laws of whatever country they live in. They have no objection to Muslim men who, although they already have a wife at home, wish to marry a second one in the foreign country they have come to for work or study, and Islamic expatriate Web sites offer advice to prospective brides who find themselves having second thoughts.<sup>7</sup> Traditionalists who are closer to the modernist end of the spectrum, and those who believe this issue not to be worth the scorn and disapproval it inspires in outsiders, genuinely oppose polygamy. However, there is no doubt that the Quran allows it and that Muhammad and the early leaders of Islam practiced it. Therefore, being tradi-

<sup>6</sup>"Definition" and "Party Culture," on Hizb-ut-Tahrir's official Web site.

<sup>7</sup>Note that all our citations of online publications and Web sites reflect the content as it existed between January and September 2002. Some of these texts have been changed or modified since then, though not substantially.

tionalists, they are unable to disavow it and, in fact, feel obliged to defend it. To this purpose, they generally put forward one or more of the following arguments to make it more palatable to modern audiences:

They point out that Muhammad was monogamous during the lifetime of his first wife, Khadija, during which Islam was first revealed to him. This, they say, should therefore be taken as the ideal condition for Muslims to emulate.

They say that Muhammad's multiple marriages were largely made for alliances and were either political or charitable rather than being personal. These traditionalists point out that some were probably marriages in name only, designed to cement a political alliance or care for a friend's widow.<sup>8</sup> In fact, they argue, polygamy in the early Muslim community was a kind of welfare project, a response to the shortage of men that war had caused, which led to a surplus of women, including many widows in need of protectors and breadwinners.

It replaced, others assert, the much worse misuse of women in pre-Islamic society, in contrast to which a regulated polygamy limited to only four wives who had to be treated equally and whose economic and legal status was guaranteed was an improvement.

Reformist traditionalists (like fundamentalists) sometimes argue that polygamy can be seen as a convenience for women, who can share child-raising and domestic chores and thereby free their time for jobs and other interests. Also, they assert, the practice is superior to what has emerged in the West. The high divorce rate in Western industrial society, after all, is really just a form of serial polygamy. Since it includes abandonment, it is especially hurtful to the women and children involved, while the Islamic approach entitles the displaced wife to a lifetime of equal financial, emotional, and (theoretically) sexual disbursements.

Women who find the practice personally offensive are legally entitled to add a stipulation to their marriage contract that will prevent their husband from taking additional wives, these traditionalists note.

A somewhat laborious argument that traditionalists frequently use is that the injunction to treat all wives equally was really just a kind of divine sleight-of-hand. Since it is impossible to do this, as the Quran itself elsewhere observes, the injunction in fact nullifies polygamy.

A typical text might argue as follows (Maqsood, 1994b, pp. 182–183):

The Prophet remained monogamous throughout the 24 years of his marriage to Khadijah; after her death he married the widow Sawdah and was engaged to his friend's daughter, Aisha; and after the deaths of so many Muslims in battle the

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<sup>8</sup>For one of many refutations of this version, see Calislar (1999).



permission to marry up to four wives was given to Muslim men. The Prophet himself had special dispensation and married 13 women in total, all except Aisha being widows or divorcees needing care . . .

Polygamy is also allowed if a man's wife becomes so physically ill that she is no longer able to look after him or the family, or if she becomes mentally ill. Should a man be expected to live for the rest of his life without any sexual comfort, or should he divorce the unfortunate wife, or should he marry another?

(The author—a woman—does not explain why the reverse occurrence should not therefore authorize the woman to take more than one husband.)

Similarly, in his book *Islam Today*, which received the *Los Angeles Times* award for best nonfiction book of the year, U.S. reformist traditionalist Akbar Ahmed (2001, p. 152) writes,

There is another idea about family life that is difficult to lay to rest in the West. It is of Islam as a man's paradise with every man possessing at least four wives . . . . The Quran has clearly given permission for men to marry more than once, and in certain circumstances this is a social necessity: . . . "marry such women as seem good to you, two, three or four" (4:3). But in the next line the Quran lays down a clause: "If you think you will not act justly, then one." This is a stringent condition making it difficult for a person to marry more than once. Indeed the Quran itself says that polygamy is not possible: "You will never manage to deal equitably with women no matter how hard you try" (4:129). The true spirit of the Quran thus appears to be monogamy . . . . None the less Muslims are not apologetic or defensive about polygamy . . . .

**Modernists** do not need to engage in such elaborations. They simply point to the fact that "changing times" bring changing customs and moralities. What was acceptable hundreds of years ago is no longer considered acceptable today—and of course the Quran was ambivalent about it even then. Instead of focusing on specifics that are no longer relevant in the entirely different setting of a modern urban world, one should concentrate on the essence of the Prophet's teachings and his example. One will then find that he strove toward ever greater equality, justice, and harmony as the guiding principles of social interaction, that he was a social reformer. Therefore, introducing reforms into society is in keeping with the spirit of Islam.

### **Criminal Punishments, Islamic Justice**

Fundamentalists and many conservative traditionalists argue for the deterrent value of Islam's severe criminal penalties. This is usually not true of reformist traditionalists, however. As traditionalists, they do not feel able to criticize or deny the rules. Instead, they look for ways around them.

In the case of theft, for example, some do this by arguing that most instances of that crime fall outside the strict legal definition of the circumstances that would

warrant amputation. If poverty, material need, hunger, or the desire to provide for one's family are present as a motive, they claim, the thief is exonerated—society is to be blamed for the crime, not the person who was forced by adverse circumstances to commit it. If, on the other hand, the theft is completely frivolous, it clearly constitutes a mental disturbance, which again is a mitigating circumstance that excuses the perpetrator from such a severe punishment. (See, for example, Maqsood, 1994b, p. 137.)

How Muslim countries resolve such dilemmas mirrors the forces active within them. Pakistan, for example, is home to a vocal and politically potent fundamentalist segment; it also has a significant traditionalist population; and politically, it wishes to affiliate itself with the modern international community. How can the country reconcile these goals on the issue of Islamic criminal justice? Abandoning shari'a law would alienate the fundamentalists and portions of the traditionalists, but amputating hands and stoning adulterers would lead to international condemnation and alienate domestic modernists and some traditionalists. The solution: Impose shari'a sentences but do not carry them out. (See, for example, Reuters, 2002.)

We can also apply the reverse approach, deducing a country's goals from the policy it chooses on shari'a law. If a country not only pays lip service to shari'a law but actually imposes the consequent sentences, we can conclude that it is interested only in the audience of fundamentalists and conservative traditionalists and has no desire to align itself with the modern democratic world.

Besides amputations of the hands and, in the cases of repeat offenders, also the feet of thieves, shari'a law imposes the death sentence for adultery and flogging for fornication. This is not controversial among fundamentalists or the conservative traditionalists closest to them—but it should be, because there is significant ambiguity in the Quran on this issue. Concerning the treatment of adulterous women, the text says to “call in four witnesses from among yourselves against them; if they testify to their guilt confine them to their houses till death overtakes them or till Allah finds another way for them.”

This can be interpreted to mean that the woman should be immured or walled in until she dies of suffocation, or starvation, but equally, it can be taken to require her solitary lifelong confinement until her natural death. There is no reported instance of this punishment in either interpretation being implemented in any Muslim country, even though the Quran is unequivocal in ordering it. Instead, women (and men) deemed guilty of adultery have variously been beheaded, stoned, or shot, with stoning the most common method.

The more commonly seized-upon escape clause for reformist traditionalists and conservative traditionalists refers to the rules of evidence. An adultery charge requires four Muslim witnesses. The text itself, as we saw, does not

specify what exactly these witnesses ought to have seen. Orthodox scholars generally say that they must have seen the actual act of adultery, not just circumstantial evidence leading them to believe that it had likely taken place. This clearly stacks the deck significantly in favor of the defendant.

Fundamentalists are not usually constrained by that rule, which shows that they are well outside the bounds of orthodoxy. There were, for example, no witnesses at all in the case of the Nigerian woman recently sentenced to death for adultery. In her case, the fact that she had given birth to a child, although she was not married, sufficed as evidence. Neither the Quran nor any of the thousands of hadiths mentions such a conclusion, although surely such a circumstance must also have occurred at some point during those years. If anything, this judgment contradicts the Quranic injunction that a woman should “never be made to suffer on account of her child.” It is not difficult to extend that injunction to mean that a woman probably should not be executed on account of her child.

But fundamentalists, as noted earlier, do not feel constrained by the literal substance of Islam. Nowhere was this more evident than with the Taliban. They executed women by shooting them—a penalty certainly not in keeping with the literal law of Islam, which originated before the age of guns. The Taliban also executed homosexuals, inventing in that case both the death penalty and the means of executing it: tying them to a wall and running a bulldozer over them to crush them to death (see Ahmad Rashid, 2000, and Amnesty International, 1999). The Quran says: “If two men among you commit indecency punish them both. If they repent and mend their ways, let them be” (4:13). It does not mention the nature of the punishment, but bulldozers cannot have been involved, and it does not seem likely that, given the alternative, the Taliban’s victims were given the option of “repenting” and refused it.

Shari’a law prescribes flogging as a penalty for various offenses, such as the consumption of alcohol. International public opinion no longer considers this to be a civilized form of punishment. Again, traditionalists cannot override the fact that Islamic law clearly calls for this punishment. They can only seek arguments to make it somehow more palatable.

The case reformist traditionalist author Ruqaiyyah Maqsood (1994a, p. 138) makes is typical:

There are numerous rules governing the administration of Islamic flogging; it is not just a savage beating inflicted capriciously . . . . It has to be done with control, in accord with justice, and in the kindest possible way in the circumstances, following a long list of stipulations, including deferment when someone is sick, not to touch face, head or private parts, women to be fully clothed and allowed to sit, not to be done on days of extreme heat or cold, and so forth.

As with adultery, one can also minimize the chances that the undesirable penalty will be applied by adding to the burden of proof. For instance, a number of hadiths discourage believers from spying on each other, denouncing others or trying to find fault with them. These can be used to argue that drinking in the privacy of one's own home should not be punished, since it would not have been discovered in the first place if someone had not first violated the injunction against meddling and spying.

### Minorities

The picture that study of the text yields about other monotheistic religions is mixed. The Quran contains many hostile, incendiary passages about Jews and Christians, but it also contains some conciliatory ones. This has been explained in reference to historic circumstances—the original Islamic community was at war with these groups.

In general, non-Muslims living under Muslim control are supposed to be permitted to practice their religions without obstacles. Muslim men are even instructed to allow their Jewish or Christian wives to practice their faiths freely. Minorities should be able to have their own courts and apply their own laws in civil matters. Historically, minority communities have often fared relatively well under Islamic empires.

Fundamentalists do not continue this tradition, instead tending to act repressively toward non-Muslims living under their control. Fundamentalist terrorist groups have attacked churches in Pakistan, killing the worshipers. In Saudi Arabia, Christians and Jews may not establish churches or synagogues and may not observe their own religious holidays.

The Taliban imposed its rules on everyone.<sup>9</sup> When the Taliban adopted the Wahhabi religious interpretation that women should not be permitted to drive cars, it also applied to foreign women working with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Hindus were excused from the forcibly imposed public prayers but at the expense of stigmatization: They were supposed to wear yellow identifying patches.

Traditionalists tend to be ecumenical, although their goals are to establish an Islamic society and encourage conversion. In theory, this should be accomplished by setting a good example and by persuasion, not by compulsion.

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<sup>9</sup>The Taliban Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Suppression of Vice appears to have not only been copied from but also trained and funded by the Saudi religious police, or *mutaween* (Fisk, 1998).

## Women's Dress

On purely objective grounds, it is surprising that the issue of hijab has managed to attain such vast importance, because the Quran very manifestly does not support it. The Quran requires modest dress and modest conduct for both men and women. It does not specify what that means in terms of clothing but cites two guidelines: local custom and the person's station in life, i.e., his or her work. Only a very specific group of women, namely the Prophet's wives, were instructed to cover themselves in the hijab sense of the term. This provision is contained in a late section of the Quran that specifically addresses the ways in which their situation differs from that of other women. They are asked to consider their unusual circumstances and to accept exceptional restrictions—not to remarry after the Prophet dies and to wear special concealing garments—and in return they are promised “double the reward” of ordinary mortals.

Modernists and the more progressive among reformist traditionalists point this out. They also note the explanation given in the Quran and hadith for the rules of dress: Modest people are supposed to avoid attracting special notice. Where it is not the majority dress, hijab accomplishes the opposite. It draws special attention to a woman and causes people to stare at her, the very effect she should be trying to avoid, were she truly modest. Finally, they refer to two basic messages in the Quran: that there should be “no compulsion in religion” and that “God does not desire hardship, but desires ease” for his followers. Pressuring women to wear a certain mode of dress they have not freely chosen, constraining their ability to work, singling them out for hostility or discrimination, causing a negative impact on their comfort and health—none of these are in harmony with that injunction.

Scriptural fundamentalists and traditionalists engage in lengthy debates over the issue of women's dress, weighing the pros and cons of various arguments before coming to some sort of judgment. Web sites in which people narrate the years-long soul-searching they have personally engaged in over this issue are very popular, as are narratives of girls describing why they have decided to wear or not to wear hijab, and pronouncements by numerous religious experts.

Radical fundamentalists ignore the debate; for them, the issue is settled, and hijab is mandatory. One hallmark of radical fundamentalist doctrinal practice is their selectivity. Typically, their publications on this subject will quote the sura urging “believing women to lower their gaze” but will leave out the rest of the sentence, which identically requires “believing men to lower their gaze.” However, while the largest part of the burden of maintaining “public morality” falls on women, who must accept restrictive dress and banishment from public space, fundamentalist men are not entirely exempt. As the Australian fundamentalist Web site Nida'ul Islam recommends, all children should be taught to

feel uncomfortable in the presence of the opposite sex and embarrassed about their bodies (Islam, 1998):

We should use the Prophet as an example: Abu Said Al Khudri reported that the Prophet was more shy than a virgin in her own room. (Bukhari) If we instill this into [children] at an early age then, inshallah, whenever they are near the vicinity of the opposite sex, they will feel shy and, therefore, will not act inappropriately.<sup>10</sup>

This premise—that a person who is socialized to feel inhibited and neurotic about sexuality is more likely to act “appropriately” in this sphere is an adult—clearly depends on one’s definition of what constitutes appropriate conduct.

In any event, the issue of hijab has become highly politicized. As one expert notes,<sup>11</sup>

Hijab . . . has become a symbol of traditionalism and fundamentalism. As such it is politicized and used by anti-Western groups from Turkey to Malaysia and throughout the Arab world. Western governments, especially the U.S., should refrain from making any references to “the right of women to wear the hijab” as being a simple democratic right. It is more than this, and the hidden message behind hijab is very dangerous.

### Husbands Allowed to Beat Wives

Fundamentalists have no problem with this. In the case of radical fundamentalists, it fits their hierarchical view of society and their ideal of female subordination. Scriptural fundamentalists find it to be in accord with their overall disciplinary approach to human conduct, which includes such institutions as a religious police armed with whips and sticks, patrolling the streets to monitor the length of men’s hair, the observance of prayers, the absence of polish on women’s fingernails, and the like.

Conservative traditionalists also accept the practice<sup>12</sup> but try to make a distinction between a “benevolent” didactic intervention, employed rarely and

<sup>10</sup>Note that the title of the article in which this appears uses *G-B* as a discreet abbreviation for *Girlfriend-Boyfriend*, a relationship apparently too horrible even to spell out. Let it be noted that, on the basis of hadith, one rather gains the impression that Muhammad was relaxed and informal in the presence of women. He liked to socialize with Aisha’s friends, stayed in the room when they visited her to play music, joked with women in the neighborhood, and gave advice to women on a variety of quite intimate matters.

<sup>11</sup>Birol Yesilada, personal communication, March 2003.

<sup>12</sup>For example, see Abdur Rahman Doi (2001):

A refractory wife has no legal right to object to her husband exercising his disciplinary authority. Islamic law, in keeping with most other systems of law (which ones might those be? He does not specify), recognizes the husband’s right to discipline his wife for disobedience.

Doi is Director of the Center for Islamic Legal Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaira, Nigeria.

intended to correct the wife's wrongful behavior "for her own good," which is acceptable, and an abusive exercise of domestic violence, which is not.

Reformist traditionalists usually do not support the practice but search for justifications and alternative interpretations.

This is the text:

As for those [women] from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further action against them. (4:34)

This Quranic passage offers potential ambiguity in two places: in the term specifying what kind of cause might justify such a response and in the term describing the response itself. Some latch onto the first ambiguity and argue that this passage applies only to very major offenses. While they remain unspecified in the text, Muhammad's contemporaries undoubtedly knew what was meant. They argue that the Arabic term used to describe the wife's offense is closer to "rebellion" than to "disobedience" and suggest that it perhaps was meant to refer to apostasy or to subversive political activity on the part of the wife.

Some authors focus on the second ambiguous term. Traditionalist authorities can spend many paragraphs discussing the exact terminology and concluding that the text does not really mean to "beat" or even to "strike," but should be interpreted as meaning to "lightly tap" (Rauf, 2002). Qaradawi instructs that wives may be hit, but not on the face. The American Muslim publication *Islamic Horizons*, in a special issue dedicated to the topic of domestic violence, proposes in all seriousness that the correct application of this Quranic verse is for the husband to give an errant wife "a few taps" with a "siwak," a kind of toothbrush. This, the author concludes, is "reasonable, dignified, and fairly flawless, for each spouse's human dignity is respected" (Abusulayman, 2003, p. 22). We would be hard-pressed to invent a better illustration for the inability of Islamic traditionalists, even reformist traditionalists, to manage the challenges of modernity than a text like the one above, which earnestly proposes the spectacle of a man resolving disputes by hitting his wife with a toothbrush as an example of a dignified relationship.

For modernists, again, this issue is not a problem. Like the Old Testament, the Quran includes content no longer relevant today, and there is no need to struggle with it. Further, they doubt the authenticity of that sura altogether, since it contradicts what one knows about the Prophet's attitudes and behavior, other passages in the Quran, and the bulk of hadiths concerning marital relations and the appropriate conduct of a husband toward a wife. Numerous hadiths disapprove of marital violence, but these do not make their way to fun-

damentalist or to conservative traditionalist Web sites. In one such hadith, the Prophet makes the point that it is inappropriate and primitive to hit a person with whom one intends in the future again to be intimate. Famously, the Prophet's final deathbed comment warned men to "fear God in your treatment of women." And finally, due to the intense scrutiny paid to the Prophet's private life by his contemporaries, we have a large number of anecdotes related to disputes he had with his wives. From these stories we know that when he became angry he made sarcastic remarks, sulked, complained to his father-in-law, and at least once withdrew to a different floor of the house for an entire month.

The Quran was not recorded in writing until well after the Prophet's death. It was then assembled by collecting various scraps of bark or bone upon which witnesses to the revelations had recorded them and by locating individuals who had memorized certain suras and having them dictate the text as best they recalled it. This project eventually resulted in the production of several versions of the Quran, which differed from each other. Eventually, to prevent discord, all versions but one were destroyed (see Parwez, 2002). It is widely accepted that at least two suras were lost in that process. Modernists point out that some may also have been falsely or inaccurately recorded. To traditionalists, however, who revere as infallible and divine each letter of the Quran and even the paper it is printed on, that notion is anathema.