12.

The Return of Islam?

When and why did this change toward Islamist politics occur throughout the Muslim world? Many Arabs and Middle East specialists opt for June 1967 as the turning point. During those six days in June Israeli forces routed the combined forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan and occupied the entire Sinai Peninsula, Golan Heights, and all of what had been Mandate Palestine up to the Jordan River. It was a body blow not only to Nasserist Pan-Arabism but to existing regimes throughout the Arab world. As a traumatic event bringing into focus the failures of previous decades of ideology and institution building the Six Day War of 1967 can hardly be exaggerated.

Yet, although the June War undoubtedly had a decisive effect on subsequent events in the region, Islamist politics would probably have emerged even if this very surprising and avoidable war had not occurred.[1] Nasserist Pan-Arabism was already in decline. The idea that a larger Arab political entity was the wave of the future had been jolted six years earlier, in 1961. That year brought the breakup of the Egyptian-Syrian union that had created the United Arab Republic only three years earlier, in 1958.

Moreover, the June War did not necessarily discredit territorial nationalism throughout the Arab world. This crushing Arab defeat actually strengthened one important nationalist movement, that of the Palestinians. Observers with an eye for irony were wont to insist that the only victors of the June War had been Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The latter under Yasir Arafat's leadership became thereafter less a creature of the Egyptian-dominated Arab League and

more a nationalist movement (a would-be state) beholden to its own self-defined interests.

In any case, Arabs make up only about one-fifth of the world's Muslims. However shocking this 1967 war was to Arabs (and it certainly was that), it was less so to the millions of Muslims concerned with events closer to home.[2] To cite a few critical events in other Muslim countries, the 1965 army coup in Indonesia toppled Sukarno with resulting disturbances that brought the massacre of some 750,000 Indonesians (a conservative estimate). Nigeria in 1966 had coups and countercoups pitting the largely Christian Ibos against the predominantly Muslim Hausa. The Ibos then in 1967 seceded from Nigeria creating Biafra only to be defeated in a long, bitter civil war lasting until 1970. In Pakistan 1969 marked the resignation of Ayub Khan discredited after a decade-long rule only to be replaced by another general. Worse was to come in 1971 when East Pakistan seceded and became the independent state of Bangladesh. India, supporting Bangladesh, then intervened in December 1971 and soundly defeated Pakistan in a two-week war. The sixties in Turkey opened and closed with military interventions: in 1960 and 1970. The year of 1963 in Iran brought a confrontation between the shah's regime and the opposition led by one Ayatullah Khomeini, then little-known outside of Iran. Ayatullah Khomeini was sent into exile, and the shah's ambitious programs of reform from the top seemed on the road to some success. It would take events of the following decade to demonstrate the depth of Iranian opposition and the fragility of Pahlavi autocracy.

In short, no one event signals the move of Islamism from the wings to center stage in the vast and diverse Muslim world. Setting the June 1967 war alongside the several other crises taking place throughout the Muslim world does, however, reveal a significant temporal concordance: various regime- and system-challenging confrontations did take place within roughly one decade. This is perhaps as accurate an answer to the question "when" as can be provided.

But why? Just as no single event pinpoints the timing, no monocausal explanation offers an adequate answer. That the existing political leadership had scant popularity is generally true, with rare (and then only limited) exceptions. All too many regimes, in spite of their populist rhetoric, relied on army, police, and intelligence forces to stay in power. This answer, however, demands yet another question. Why did these many regimes command such limited loyalty? The existing political leaders throughout most of the Muslim world were of the generation that had won independence from Western colonial rule. One might have thought that this aura of achievement would continue to offer these rulers some margin of maneuver. It

appears that just the opposite was the case. Most of these regimes were seen by their people as having fallen far short of the expectations with which the newly independent years were ushered in.

Such a blanket appraisal needs further refinement. The governing elites of the many different Muslim countries add up to such a mixed bag—military juntas, traditional monarchs, single-party regimes and ranging from radical left to reactionary right on the political spectrum—that lumping them all together as having limited political legitimacy offers scant explanatory power. Why was this generalized religio-political malaise directed against these many and diverse establishment structures? There are, in fact, a number of factors that transcend the distinctiveness of individual regimes. These factors also bring us back to aspects of the historical developments traced in earlier chapters.

The many different modernizers and Westernizers of the Muslim world, going back to the latter years of the eighteenth century and thereafter, with fits and starts, generation after generation, had achieved one significant change: people were much more caught up in and engaged with the state. Politics was less confined to the local levels of tribe, village, or quarter. The political quietism that earlier rulers could count on to get them through difficult times was much less in evidence even though it was by no means totally dissipated. European colonialism played a role here, for alien rule had centralized power. States had become more capable of influencing the daily lives of all inhabitants. The one consistent legacy of independence was an enlarged and strengthened public arena. European pressure and example had stimulated the same result in those states, e.g., Iran and Turkey, that had escaped outright colonial rule.

Nationalist and populist ideologies had so permeated society that even autocrats, both the traditional and the parvenus, employed a terminology loaded with references to democracy, equality, brotherhood, and "the people." The ideological climate fostered not only a sense of belonging to the larger community but also great expectations. People whose ancestors had expected nothing but fiscal and physical burdens from government were being exposed to the quite different ideas of government as both representative and servant of this larger community that made up the nation. Such perceptions were, of course, still offset by deeply ingrained pessimisism regarding arbitrary government. Even so, these nationalist and populist ideologies had imposed a new and dangerously high level of expectation upon government. That most governments fell short of these high standards is hardly surprising.

Major social changes undergirded these nationalist ideologies. The last several decades have witnessed a massive rural to urban migration throughout the Muslim world. In the short span of forty years the estimated urban

percentage of the total populations in selected Muslim countries has increased as follows:

Table 12.1

	1950	1960	1970	1991
Egypt	31.9%	45%	42%	47%
Indonesia	*n*.a.	15%	17%	31%
Iran	20%	34%	42%	57%
Nigeria	n.a.	13%	20%	36%
Pakistan	10.4%	22%	25%	33%
Tunisia	25.9%	36%	44%	55%
Turkey	21.3%	30%	38%	63%

Sources: United Nations, *Demographic Yearbook 1960* and World Bank, *World Development Report* 1984, 1993, and 1994.

In two of these countries (Iran and Pakistan) the urban proportion of the total population more than doubled from 1950 to 1970. The shift in Tunisia and Turkey was only slightly less. Indonesia and Nigeria accomplished the awesome population shift of more than doubling the urban proportion in the period 1970–1991.

This massive population transfer to the cities becomes even more imposing when set alongside the overall population increase during these years. For the same countries the population estimates for the decades from 1950 to 1990 are as follows:

Table 12.2

	Total Estimated Populations (millions)				
	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
Egypt	20.40	25.33	33.30	42.30	53.15
Indonesia	73.50	92.60	121.20	148.03	179.30
Iran	18.70	20.68	28.66	37.45	54.61
Nigeria	24.00	35.09	55.07	77.08	108.54
Pakistan	75.04	93.73	114.19	82.14[3]	112.05
Tunisia	3.47	4.17	5.14	6.37	8.07
Turkey	20.9	27.8	35.23	44.92	58.69

Sources: United Nations Yearbooks for 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, and 1991.

Millions of people throughout the Muslim world have thus been obliged to adopt the changing lifestyles imposed by the move from rural to urban areas—all within a decade or so. Even if, as urbanists have pointed out, these rural folk of yesteryear often clustered together and managed to "ruralize" the cities as much they were urbanized by their new environment, the change of territorial location and the unavoidable accommodation to radically different spatial arrangements necessarily brought a major physical and psychological uprooting.

This same time period has also witnessed an equally imposing quantitative change in school attendance, and since this increase has been carried out by the state it has been accordingly uniform and "national" in its impact. Since the 1950s all Muslim countries have registered impressive increases in education to such extent that most have achieved, or come very close to, universal primary school education for both boys and girls. Available figures for selected countries for the decades 1960–1990 reveal the following:

Table 12.3

	Number Enrolled in Primary School as Percentage of Age Group							
	T = Total percentage				F = Total percentage of females			
	1960		1970		1980		1990	
	T	F	T	F	T	F	T	F
Bangladesh	47%	26%	54%	35%	62%	47%	73%	68%
Egypt	66	52	72	57	76	52	98	90
Indonesia	71	58	80	73	98	91	117	114
Iran	65	27	72	52	101	80	106	102
Morocco	47	27	52	36	76	58	68	55
Nigeria	36	27	37	27	98	—	72	63
Pakistan	30	13	40	22	57	30	37	26
Saudi Arabia	12	2	42	29	64	51	78	72
Tunisia	66	43	100	79	103	88	116	109
Turkey	75	58	110	94	101	93	110	105

Note: Gross enrollment ratios may exceed 100 percent because some pupils are younger or older than the country's standard primary school age.

Beginning the statistical table as late as 1960 actually minimizes the extent of increased school attendance, for in several Muslim states the great increase in school attendance started a decade or so earlier. Tunisia, for example, in 1945 had only 9.5 percent of the primary school age population in school, and that figure had risen to 27 percent a decade later.[4] In Egypt the 1950 primary school enrollment took in only about 30 percent of the school age population,[5] not a bad record compared with most Muslim or, for that matter, third world countries at that time. That percentage had been more than doubled by the end of the decade.

The numbers enrolled in secondary education, while much smaller, are no less impressive in terms of the increases achieved in recent decades:

Table 12.4

	Number Enrolled in Primary School as Percentage of Age Group							
	T = Total percentage				F = Total percentage of females			
	1960		1970		1980		1990	
	T	F	T	F	T	F	T	F
Bangladesh	—	8%	—	—	15%	—	17%	11%
Egypt	16	5	35	23	52	—	82	17
Indonesia	6	—	16	11	28	—	45	41
Iran	12	—	27	18	44	—	56	47
Morocco	5	—	13	7	24	—	36	30
Nigeria	4	—	4	3	15	—	20	17
Pakistan	11	—	13	5	15	—	22	13
Saudi Arabia	2	—	12	5	51	—	48	41
Tunisia	12	—	23	13	27	—	45	40
Turkey	14	—	27	15	37	—	54	42

Sources for this and the table above: World Bank, *World Development Report*, 1983, 1984, and 1993.

The picture in higher education is especially important, for it is largely from the ranks of this group that the leaders and cadres of the several Islamist movements have come. The percentages become proportionally less as one moves from primary through secondary to higher education, but—again—the sharp rate of net increase in all levels stands out.

Table 12.5

	Number Enrolled in Higher Education as Percentage of Age Group[6]			
	1960	1970	1980	1990
Bangladesh	1%	3%	3%	3%
Egypt	5	18	18	19
Indonesia	1	4	4	10
Iran	1	4	4	6
Morocco	1	6	6	10
Nigeria	—	2	3	3
Pakistan	1	—	2	3
Saudi Arabia	—	7	7	14
Tunisia	1	5	5	9
Turkey	3	6	6	14

Percentages may well leave an overly bland impression. Perhaps citing a few figures will help: it has been estimated that the total number of students in higher education throughout the entire Arab world in 1945 was 20,000. By 1979 that number had increased to 1,000,000. The corresponding figures for Turkey are under 20,000 in 1945 and 270,000 in 1979.[7] University College at Ibadan in Nigeria was established in 1948, with 210 students in residence during its first year; today roughly 336,000 Nigerians are students in higher education.[8]

This vast national investment in education throughout the Muslim world was, consistent with the dominant nationalist ideologies prevailing in those years, designed to train modern productive citizens (not subjects). It was, accordingly, a state-directed Kulturkampf fought on two fronts—against foreign domination and also against any indigenous traditions or institutions that were believed to hamper national unity and strength. Of course, these dual aims were burdened with a built-in ambiguity if not downright contradiction. The nationalist leaders were rejecting alien Western culture even while adopting in large measure that same alien Western educational curriculum. They were vaunting indigenous culture but doing so selectively, weeding out elements that impeded national unity and strength.

Parts of the national heritage destined to be passed over in silence, if not, indeed, obliterated, included much of the traditional centuries-old synthesis of the Muslim religion in its relation to the state. The curriculum was to be set by the state, not the ulama. The teachers also were to be trained in state

schools, not educational institutions manned by the ulama. There was to be a single unified national legal system controlled by the state, not by the ulama serving as qadis. Sufi brotherhoods were viewed as obscurantist. They were also seen as representing so many disparate pockets of particularism and thus were obstacles to national unity. Where states had significant numbers of non-Muslims a high priority was given to developing a political community of citizens with equal rights and obligations regardless of religion.

The political leadership in certain Muslim states openly championed these nationalist goals. Leaders in other states were more circumspect, but essentially the same goals were implicit in the actions taken. One example of the former approach in education was Tunisia under the leadership of Habib Bourguiba and the Neo-Destour Party. The stated educational purpose was to create "new Tunisians" and, in the process, do away with societal norms associated with the "old turbans." In 1947 a Tunisian professor at the Institute des Hautes Etudes (created only two years earlier, in 1945, and the matrix of what was to become the University of Tunis) insisted that "education is social integration. If the society is a living reality, one and indivisible, the culture will be so as well, and the pedagogical system must be a harmonious whole. . . . To ignore the principle of cultural unity is . . . to sow the seeds of discord."[9] That same professor, appointed minister of education in 1958, two years after independence, put his ideas to practice with a vengeance. This meant that the religious primary and secondary schools as well as the venerable mosque-university of Zaytuna were quickly absorbed into the single integrated national educational system.

There was no time to lose. A major Tunisian policy statement insisted that "reduced or only slowly increasing school attendance implies a choice of underdevelopment or at least a resigned attitude toward a permanent protraction of economic and social underdevelopment." The policy of accelerated schooling keyed to national goals would, on the contrary, support "any plan of transforming the economic and social structure of the nation."[10]

Islamic studies took a backseat to those subjects in the secular and modern curriculum in terms of the number of hours taught, and the idea of what constituted Islamic thought was presented in an early official statement of the different secondary curricular options as follows:

> The methods to be relied upon in teaching Islamic thought should be those employed in what is today called the study of religious thought from the sociological point of view. This is the method which attempts to go beyond the investigation of any given mindset [*'Aqliyya* in

> Arabic] in order to discover the substantive factors which determined its various viewpoints just as they determined the solutions and the problems arising out of that very mindset in any given age. This method, in short, calls not for simply receiving and believing but for thought, investigation and criticism.[11]

This is a bold statement. One might well ask if it would pass muster with the typical American school board reviewing secondary school curricula. Similar boldness characterized other Tunisian reforms in those heady early years after independence was gained in 1956. The radical Personal Status Law of 1956 that, among other things, gave women rights equal to men in matters of marriage and divorce exemplified the trend. Only Ataturk's earlier reforms in Turkey are comparable in secularizing revolutionary zeal.

Most states were more cautious in taking on the entrenched religious establishment or challenging the traditional views that most members of the community had long accepted as normal, if not, indeed, God-given. Nor did these revolutionary reforms that characterized Bourguiba's Tunisia or Ataturk's Turkey immediately penetrate all levels of society. A recurring pattern in modern Muslim history is that of reformers, in a hurry to catch up with the dominant—and domineering—West, imposing reforms from the top and coming up against those resistant to the changes being ordered. Sometimes the partisans of modernization have had the upper hand, sometimes their opponents.

Seen in this light, the bold reformist program of a Tunisia and the more cautious acts of other states merge to establish an important general trend: the decades of the 1950s and 1960s represented the heyday of secularizing, centralizing, nationalizing Muslim states.

Then, what happened? A few maxims popularized by social science research on the third world since the 1950s point to the answer: "the passing of traditional society," the presumed "take-off" stage of economic growth, the "revolution of rising expectations," "relative deprivation," etc.[12] The secularizing, centralizing, nationalizing political leaders were in power, but their support was thin. They would be able to deepen and institutionalize their position if their performance appeared positive on balance. That was to be a very difficult assignment.

Almost all these Muslim states adopted, with greater or lesser intensity and persistence, the planning strategy of a "command economy" (taking their guidance from either Western developmental economic thought or the Communist model). What, after all, was more in line with the basic ideology of secularizing, modernizing, centralizing nationalism than an economy

planned and controlled by the state? At the same time, millions of the young poured into the national educational institutions, from primary schools to universities. The intellectual old guard in these countries might well deplore the resulting decline of educational standards, and they would surely be right to some extent. That plaint, however, overlooked the more important point that virtually the entire rising generations were being socialized to the canons of, again, secularizing, modernizing, centralizing nationalism. In the process they were being dislodged from the mindset and mores of their elders.[13] They were also being shown new, more attractive, roles in these would-be societies abuilding. All the while that everpresent egalitarian populist rhetoric seemed to offer careers and lifestyles beyond the dreams of their elders.

Reality did not live up to expectations. Too many of those graduates spilling out of the newly created schools and universities could not find the jobs they had come to expect, could not even find jobs at all. Democratization, which is to say the implementation of the populist egalitarian ethos so long preached, foundered, and that earlier buzzword *guided democracy* could not paper over the reality of de facto autocracy, whether led by military cliques, single party elites, shahs, sultans, kings, or presidents for life. Centralized state planning had created swollen bureaucracies but sluggish economic performance.

The military performance of Muslim states could only add to this sense of beleaguered impotence: the last half-century has been marked by six Arab-Israeli wars and six Arab losses,[14] plus three wars between India and Pakistan.[15] Added to this bleak legacy have been the several intra-Muslim wars, the most devastating being the Iraq-Iran war (1980–1988), but others less costly in lives and resources highlighted divisions within the Muslim *umma*. These have included the border disputes between Morocco and Algeria, Egyptian intervention in the Yemen Civil War in the early and mid 1960s, and the 1991 Gulf War beginning with one Arab state (Iraq) overrunning and annexing another (Kuwait) and followed by the liberation of Kuwait in which several Arab states joined the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq.

Ironically, the two Muslim states that achieved some success against outside military forces, Afghanistan and Somalia, drew their military prowess from traditional tribalism.[16] As such, they were the very antithesis of centralized and modernized nation-states. Their victory was to that extent yet another reproach to the secularizing, centralizing, modernizing nationalists.

Compounding all of the troubles confronting established political leadership was the stark demographic dimension: population growth and popula-

tion transfer (rural to urban but also the millions of Muslims seeking their economic Eldorado in the oil-rich Arabian Peninsula or in Europe) during these years reached unprecedented intensities. The millions of people coming into the Muslim world, the millions moving about the Muslim world increased exponentially the magnitude of all problems to be tackled. These massive physical, mental, and psychic changes taking place at an ever increasing rate produced a systemic overload so extreme as to threaten complete breakdown. No, reality did not live up to expectations. It could not.