Conclusion

After sketching the Islamic heritage in politics and political thought in part 1, this study outlined in part 2 developments over the past two centuries leading to the present-day phenomenon of radical political movements (or, in a few cases, governments) claiming to be based on a true understanding of what Islam requires. The ideological dimension, concentrating on the representative Islamist religio-political thinkers and their ideas, has provided the organizational framework. The actual politics of these Islamist movements has received less attention. Nor have the several contemporary Muslim spokesmen for a more liberal interpretation of Islam in its relations to worldly affairs been given their due. That is another subject for another time.

One goal of this work has been to demonstrate that the history of Muslims and Islamic civilization is too rich, diverse, and ever changing to be reduced to a few eternal essentials. Comparisons with the Christian and, to a lesser extent, the Jewish experience were intended to highlight this point. No one suggests a timeless and unchanging Christian approach to politics. The same should hold for Islam. The possible difference in its worldly manifestations between the Christianity of Paul, Augustine, Aquinas, or Luther is readily accepted. Christianity has a history. So does Islam. Christianity also has its diversity. To take just modern American examples, one appreciates that Paul Tillich and Billy Graham both fit under the rubric *Christian*. The same holds for a high church Episcopal service and a revivalist tent meeting. Islam has its equivalents.

Accordingly, to sum up in overly simplified terms how today's Muslims

are responding to politics risks defeating the larger goal of taking the measure of Muslims and Islam in all their variety. Even so, a few concluding generalizations may be warranted.

I have argued that the Muslim world has witnessed a dramatic change in politics and political thought in modern times. The last two centuries offer as decisive, and wrenching, a period of change for Muslims as any era in Islamic history since the worldly beginnings of Islam in Arabia over fourteen centuries ago. Muslims before the modern age had, with rare exceptions, lived in Muslim-ruled states. Over the centuries a Muslim civilization had developed in a context of self-sufficiency that justifies the oft-used phrase *Muslim world.* While the many different peoples living in these several Muslim polities were always in contact with others, the important concept of *Dar al-Islam* (the abode of Islam) was more than a theological construct. It reflected a historically shaped reality.

This Muslim cultural autonomy began to be challenged and ultimately almost overwhelmed in modern times, a process that began roughly two centuries ago in the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent (the Muslim heartland organized politically into the Ottoman, Safavid, and Moghul Empires, the last and in many respects most impressive of the many Muslim dynasties), somewhat earlier in the East Indies, somewhat later in the Maghrib, Africa, and Central Asia.

In this new era Muslim leaders sought, and are still seeking, strategies to cope with the new realities brought in large measure by the threatening/attractive alien West. These strategies have ranged from accommodation to outright resistance. In the process the ideologies advanced have been presented in the terminology of classical Islamic political thought, which is based on a selective idealization of Islam's golden age, the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslim community.

These calls for being true to one's religious roots, so common of late, must not mislead, however. The radical Islamists offer not simply a "return of Islam" in the sense of a getting back to some history-defying Islamic essence. They also advance new ideas served up in familiar old terms. Although the radical Islamists, our major interest, claim to be restoring the golden age of the early Islamic period, they are, in many important respects, revolutionaries. Ayatollah Khomeini's *velayat-e faqih* advances a radical clerical control of political life outside the mainstream of classical Muslim political thought and even more removed from actual Muslim political history. Mawdudi and Qutb have radically reinterpreted *jahiliyya*, making it a normative standard to judge today's rulers rather than the historical period before God's revelation to Muhammad. The very idea that one Muslim can

declare another to be an infidel is out of line with the classic Muslim dispo-
sition to leave such matters to God's judgment, not man's.

Both the selective use of the past and the intrusion of the new are to be
expected. Dramatic historical changes always involve just such a choosing of
bits and pieces from a culture's past. All the more reason, therefore, to
understand that past. Such was the task set for part 1. It provided the back-
ground needed to gauge in part 2 what modern Muslims have chosen, as
well as what they have passed over, from the Islamic political heritage.
Covered in greatest detail were three Sunni Islamists (Al-Banna, Mawdudi,
and Qutb) and one Shi'i, Ayatullah Khomeini. Although many others could
be cited, it was suggested that these four had been the most influential. With
rare exception, the thoughts and actions of other Islamists can be linked to
the ideas of one or more of these four.

Will radical Islamism win out by seizing power in even more countries,
or, no less important, will the ideas of the Islamists, Al-Banna, Mawdudi,
Qutb, Khomeini, and their many followers, outlive them and thereby mod-
ify later thought and action in the Muslim world? Are we witnessing
throughout the Muslim world a historic change as decisive as was the
Reformation for the Christian West?

It is clearly too soon to know. Some observers believe that the political
appeal of the Islamists has already peaked. Others regard the Islamists as
still gaining strength.

This much can be said: the radical Islamists continue to dominate the
debate in today's Muslim world. Any ideology that claims to have an all-
embracing program, that answers all questions, has the potential to attract a
following. This is even more the case when daily life is unsatisfactory and
appears to be getting worse even as existing ways of doing things have been
discredited. Chapter 12 presented the case for a generalized Muslim malaise
that has deepened over the past several decades as harsh reality has shat-
tered the dreams of decolonization, modernization, and a restored autono-
my vis-à-vis the outside world. Most of all, in such circumstances, an ideol-
ogy claiming divine mandate, that offers salvation both here and now and in
the world to come, is a formidable opponent. Such is, and will always be, the
strength of the fervent believer.

Yet, that historical storehouse of Islamic thought concerning politics (set
out in part 1) contains themes that could be utilized by modern Muslim
thinkers to present an Islam quite different from what the radical Islamists
advance. In addition to a centuries-old tradition of political quietism, there
is the venerable Muslim resistance to permitting government to impose
religious doctrine. Political quietism is, admittedly, not a very solid founda-

tion on which to build a political ideology in today's world. Modern developments (such as growing economic interdependence, the imposing increase in literacy, the communications revolution . . .) require greater organization and group interaction, not a loosely structured pattern of individuals and groups opting out. The strong and centralized state is as necessary as is an engaged citizenry if people are to avoid the harsh penalties imposed on underdeveloped economies. Still, a certain skepticism about government matched by resistance to governmental efforts to control religion are well represented in the Muslim tradition. All this can be drawn on for present-day purposes.

More generally, alongside the great emphasis on the community (*umma*) is the deep-seated sense that the individual's Islamic credentials are to be judged by God alone, not by other men, even less by government. Thus, as compared with the history of Christendom, there have been in Islam few heresy trials, nothing quite like excommunication or anathema and not nearly so many intra-Muslim religious wars. This tolerant legacy could also be woven into a political program quite different from that of the fundamentalists.

This, in turn, relates to those Islamists as well as some Western scholars who assert there is not—cannot be—any separation between religion and the state in Islam. To say this is to ignore much of what has actually happened throughout Islamic history. There are, in any case, many varieties of separation, and of integration, between religion and the state. Admittedly, the possible liberal Muslim response to fundamentalists is unlikely to take as a model the constitutionally mandated secular state found in the United States. Still, the Islamic legacy of resisting governmental efforts to impose religious doctrine—far more effectively than in the Christian West—surely offers a useful building block for a distinctive Muslim mode of shielding religious faith and practice from the clutches of political power.

Several observers dismiss such prospects for a liberal challenge to the Islamists by maintaining that all Muslims are at least potentially fundamentalists and thus will ever be attracted to the message of the Islamists. All Muslims, so this line of argument goes, are necessarily scriptural literalists, because the divine, uncreated nature of the Qur'an is an article of faith held by all from the most latitudinarian to the strictest Islamist. That being the case, the literal injunctions found in the Qur'an (e.g., the *hadd* punishments of amputation for stealing, stoning for adultery, or the acceptance of polygyny) cannot be set aside. Well, yes, the Muslim equivalent of the Reformation's *sola scriptura* can raise problems, but the ingenuity of political theorists and theologians, past and present, suggests that this problem

has been resolved in the past and can be in the future. After all, "revelation is not God's word. Revelation is God's word in human words, and that is where the mess begins."[1]

Ironically, but ultimately offering some hope for all who harbor reservations concerning fundamentalists whether Muslims, Christians, or Jews, these scriptural literalist dreams are best broken up in the bright morning light of efforts to implement the proposed utopia. The Islamic Revolution is still alive and well in Iran after two decades, but in the eyes of Iranians and others it has necessarily been brought down from dream to reality.[2] Even more, the shaky performance of the Islamist government in Sudan or the earlier regime of Pakistan's General Zia gives fundamentalist government a very human face, warts and all.

Finally, all the world—and no part more than the Muslim world—confronts rapid vertiginous change. For Muslims, yesterday's colonial rule, today's poor performance in competing with or confronting the West, the shaky institutionalization of existing states, the stark divide between rich and poor, the massive demographic changes, and the great increase of political awareness and social expectations brought by massive increases in education set alongside a reality that frustrates this newly gained competence— all conspire to guarantee both disorientation and collective angst. The working out of problems Muslims face today will not be easy. Even a cursory look at revolutionary periods, past and present, Muslim and non-Muslim, indicates that a degree of violence and outrage (as the terrorist attacks) is, unfortunately, inescapable. With careful planning and good luck it can possibly be minimized.

How might that be done? The scholarly debate describing contemporary Muslim states and societies and predicting future developments has produced a spectrum of options. At one end are those insisting that Islam is the major factor explaining the situation of today's Muslims. Islam has so thoroughly molded them that they must be analyzed by different criteria. Islam is sui generis.

At the other end of the spectrum are found those maintaining that basic political, economic, and social factors—such as are found in all societies— account for the problems and the prospects of today's Muslim world. If the reality of daily life in these Muslim countries were more sanguine and secure, the Islamists would have scarcely a following.

When the spectrum of possible explanations is presented that baldly, the judicious would place themselves somewhere in between those two extremes. Fair enough, but at what point? As with all studies of society, past and present, giving the correct weight to the quantifiable and the material as

opposed to the ideological and psychological is a challenge. This book, while concentrating almost exclusively on the "Islamic factor," adopts a position much closer to those who would insist that Muslims are very much like other people. Islam is not sui generis.

At the same time, certain differences clearly distinguish Islam and Muslims from other religions and peoples. Islam is not, as the fundamentalist would have it, "the solution," but Islam is very much a part of whatever solutions Muslim societies choose. This book has sought to identify the distinctive Muslim approach to politics, past and present, even while keeping in mind that we "are all from Adam."[3]