

# MERIA

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIST POLITICAL THOUGHT

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*This article discusses links between the political theories and ideas of medieval and modern Islamists, showing how the latter is a continuation of the former's writings. It also shows how episodes of Islamist thought have coincided with both external conflicts with non-Muslim powers and internal ones with local regimes.*

Political Islamism has often, though not always, been treated as a relatively new phenomenon. By the same token, examinations of Medieval Islamic political thought, like those of Montgomery Watt and Ann Lambton, look at this factor in its own historical context.<sup>1</sup> There are exceptions, of course, as with Hrair Dekmejian who studied the historical cyclic responses of radical Islamism,<sup>2</sup> while Antony Black has traced the broad history of Islamic political thought.<sup>3</sup> What is both interesting and useful at present is to take a broader view of Islamist political thinking over time and the relationship between various waves of its development.

Researchers identify very different contributory factors, including a response to economic crises or social dislocation; a reaction to authoritarianism; national shame stemming from Arab military defeats; crises of national identity, quests for national authenticity; the desire for legitimating authority; and disillusionment with the failures of Western-inspired government (whether liberal democratic or Soviet-influenced) to deal with their societies' problems.<sup>4</sup>

One scholar states that Islamism is a product of "the failure of authoritarian nationalist governments, and the socio-economic divisions that have been exacerbated by neo-liberal globalization."<sup>5</sup> Another view is propounded by Nazih Ayubi, who asserts that present-day Islamism does not represent a return to any situation that existed in the past or to any former theories but, rather, "is a new

invention."<sup>6</sup> Samir Amin claims that Islamists are not interested in theology and never refer to the classical theologians, and in a similar vein Bassam Tibi argues that notions of the "Islamic state" and "God's rule" are recent additions to Islamic thought.<sup>7</sup>

To evaluate these various interpretations, this article reviews the writings of traditional Islamists and compares them with the concepts and approaches used by twentieth-century Islamists. These are important issues. To understand better the new phenomenon it is necessary to unravel the historical roots of Islamism and extremism, a heritage which is very much connected to present-day ideas and movements.

Economic factors (such as poverty) and sociopolitical factors (such as democracy and political legitimacy) have historically contributed to the emergence of Islamism. This article argues, however, that perceived military and cultural invasions have been the primary causes of Islamism and extremism both past and present. Evidence for this lies in the coincidence of past waves of Islamism with such events. It should be noted, of course, that such developments are common in regional history--and did not always produce this reaction--and thus these factors alone do not explain the phenomenon but they are of great significance in its timing and shaping.

Listed chronologically, some of the most extreme Islamists included Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (780-855), Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292-1350),

Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949), Abul A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979), and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966). The element common to all of these writers was their hostility to the military and/or cultural invasions of their time.

For Ibn Hanbal, the Mu'tazila movement of that period was a rationalist ideology stemming from Greek philosophy, and as such, he perceived it to be a serious challenge to Muslim orthodoxy (see below for details). Four centuries later the Mongol invasion prompted Ibn Taymiyya and his student, Ibn Qayyim, to preach extreme ideas. Similarly, the primary concern for Mawdudi (leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami organization) and al-Banna (head of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood) was the desire to rid Egypt and India of British domination.<sup>8</sup> More recently, Muslim nations have experienced early twentieth-century colonization by European powers, the Palestine issue, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq; in each of these cases the emergence of Islamism is quite evident.

Invasions--whether military or cultural--are seen by Islamists as evil forces supplanting true Muslim religious and cultural values. In addition to military and cultural invasions, it is argued here that the harsh treatment of Muslim ulama and activists at the hands of authorities has been yet another contributing factor in the production of extreme ideas and writings. As noted above, poverty, illiteracy, injustice, and the absence of democracy provide conditions which make extremist ideas more readily acceptable to frustrated people.

The word Islamism here includes any attempt by Muslim individuals or movements to use Islam's main sources, the Koran, the Sunna, and Islamic jurisprudence, as the foundations for political theories and ideologies. The term Islamist is used here to refer to Muslim activists in the political sphere who seek a religiously based government and policies in governance.

## LINKS BETWEEN TRADITIONALIST AND CONTEMPORARY ISLAMISTS

The link and/or parallel between these two groups will be investigated on the basis of such common concepts as *salafiyya* (return to predecessors); sovereignty; comprehensiveness and universalism; forms of Islamic government, state and religion; jihad; *takfir* (repentance); and the status of women and non-Muslims in Islam. The persecution that individual Islamists have experienced and the sociopolitical issues that Islamists and their communities have faced (such as cultural and military invasions) will also be explored to identify the development patterns of Islamic extremism. Similarities will be explored regarding possible links and/or parallels between their political theories.

### *Salafiyya*

Salafiyya is a call for "a return to true Islam" as practiced by the first generation of Muslims in the seventh century. Advocates of salafiyya believe that only by returning to the "true Islam" of the *salaf* (ancestors) can Muslims fight the immorality, foreign values and practices, and domination by others. Both types of Islamists argue that past solutions should be implemented to address contemporary problems, based on the authority of tradition, and they look to the *salaf*'s practices and texts as being sacred and equal to the main Islamic sources.<sup>9</sup>

*Traditional Islamists:* Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111) argues that a caliphate is an indispensable institution of Muslim life and is "demanded by the *ijmaa* (consensus) of the community."<sup>10</sup> Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) expressed the view that a caliphate was necessary because Muhammad's Companions and the second generation of Muslims saw it to be necessary.<sup>11</sup> By the same token, Ibn Taymiyya insisted on the implementation of Shari'a (Islamic laws), and he called it the project of Islam. He believed that it had originally been achieved by the righteous caliphs and that it could be achieved again, though it would require other instruments.<sup>12</sup>

*Contemporary Islamists:* Mawdudi, who could be considered the father of this group, argues that no *mujtahid* (qualified person on theological matters in Islam) should ever lose sight of--or proceed independently of--the guidance given by the four Muslim jurists: Hanafi (699-767), Maliki (716-795), Shafi'i (767-820) and Hanbali (780-855).<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Qutb suggests that Muslims will not be masters of their own destiny unless they walk in the footsteps of the first generation of Muslims.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1926- ) stresses the same line and says that individuals cannot interpret the Koran as they wish, but should apply principles and fundamentals compiled by previous religious leaders.<sup>15</sup>

In light of these and other views they have held, it is clear that both traditional and contemporary Islamists regard the acts and practices of the four "rightly guided" caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali) and the first and second generations of Muslims as another source of their political theories and view them as shining models of ideal Muslim rulers and believers. For example, the appointment of a caliph is regarded as an essential part of Islamist political theory and is based on what is called the *ijmaa* of Muhammad's companions. This is evident in al-Ghazali's argument on the necessity of the caliphate, for he believes that a caliphate is necessary because "it is of advantage and keeps away damage in the world." He stresses that a caliphate "is an indispensable institution of Muslim life."<sup>16</sup>

The *ijmaa* of Muhammad's companions has similar significance for the two groups. Both al-Ghazali and al-Qaradawi argue that the appointment of a caliph for the salaf was more important than the burial of Muhammad's body.<sup>17</sup> Both sides show deference to tradition, this being important because, as pointed out by John Hawley, within all religions there are powerful traditions which emphasize stories, narratives, personalities, and lives instead of codes, precepts, and lectures.<sup>18</sup> Both traditional and contemporary Islamists adopted this methodology to elaborate their ideas, and their

writings are embellished with stories and narratives of the salaf.

### ***Sovereignty and Authority***

Though the exact definition of sovereignty has varied across history, it has the core meaning of supreme authority within a territory. A government is sovereign in that its institutions have the power to set the laws and regulations in the territory it rules as it wishes, within the context of previous state law. It is at this point that the modern concept of sovereignty clashes with notions of sovereignty as understood by Islamists. Islamists such as Mawdudi, Qutb, Khomeini and Shari'ati have argued that "the basic distinction between Western polity and Islamic polity is that while the former places sovereignty in either the state or in man through the notion of popular sovereignty, the latter places it absolutely in God."<sup>19</sup> Modern-day Islamists assert that all sovereignty stems from God, and the contemporary use of the concept of God's sovereignty started after the clash between the then Egyptian and Pakistani authorities and the representatives of the Islamist movements, such as Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

However, the concept of the sovereignty of God is not something new in the Islamist lexicon and has been used by traditional Islamists for centuries.

*Traditional Islamists:* Al-Ghazali stresses the concept of the absolute sovereignty of God, and he considers the sovereignty of God to be even more important than God's unity.<sup>20</sup> Yet he was not the only one to use the concept of sovereignty, for after the collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate in 1258, it was no longer possible for Islamists, like Ibn Taymiyya, to promulgate the fiction of the obligatory nature of a universal caliphate as his predecessors had done. Therefore, Ibn Taymiyya sought a new foundation for the state, starting from the basis that absolute sovereignty belongs to God. For Ibn Taymiyya, the only source of sovereignty and authority is God. According to this doctrine, Muslims consider God to be

the absolute leader because, as Ibn Taymiyya argues, the will of God was passed to Muhammad through a revelation and so must be treated as a divine law. Thus, God is the sole bearer of sovereignty.<sup>21</sup>

*Contemporary Islamists:* Mawdudi has stated the view that God is the sole sovereign over all creatures,<sup>22</sup> and he has subsequently been supported by Qutb who insists on “no sovereignty except God’s, no law except from God, and no authority of one man over another, as the authority in all respects belong to God.”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, he suggests, “Without... the concept of a higher authority (God’s sovereignty), all values remain unstable.”<sup>24</sup> This approach to the concept of sovereignty, by Sunni Islamists, is identical to that of the Shi’a, the Iranian Shi’a leaders, even incorporating it into their national constitution, which states, “absolute sovereignty over the world and man belongs to God.”<sup>25</sup> The issue of sovereignty is very important to Muslim theologians. Ibn al-Muqaffa (724-759) insisted that if a government does not implement the requirements revealed in the Koran and Sunna, it does not merit obedience.<sup>26</sup> Indeed this question has been of central significance since the establishment of the Islamic faith, for instance during the turbulent debates between Mu’tazilis and Orthodoxies.<sup>27</sup> It reached a critical point, with Ibn Hanbal asserting that one “should only obey rulers who observe the correct religious regulations.”<sup>28</sup> Thereafter, Ibn Khaldun argued on similar lines; he stressed that if a religious state is not operating according to the rule of the Shari’a then subjects are under no obligation to give their allegiance to such a government.<sup>29</sup>

After nearly seven hundred years, Mawdudi used exactly the same argument against political authorities in the Indian subcontinent when he called on Muslims to disobey any laws that are not from God as He is the only legislator.<sup>30</sup> It has been argued that Mawdudi and Qutb were the first to use the concept of *hakimiyya ilahiyya* (God’s sovereignty), but this was clearly not the case, for as early as the reign of Ali (the fourth caliph, r. 656-661), the Khawarijis (literally “those who go out”)<sup>31</sup>

were using the slogan “*la hukm illa li-llah*” (the judgment is God’s alone)--meaning that all political decisions must be based on the words of God.<sup>32</sup>

In light of the above discussion, it is apparent that the concept of God’s sovereignty was introduced and used by traditional Islamists long before its use by contemporary Islamists and for an almost identical political purpose.

### ***Comprehensiveness and Universalism; the Superiority of Islam***

In the religious context, universalism is a theological doctrine that all human beings eventually will be saved. For Islamists, salvation will come only by Islam. Islamists argue this because of their belief in Islam’s comprehensive nature. The question to be considered in this section is not the claim of the comprehensive nature of Islam but to determine whether both groups of Islamists have assumed that Islam incorporates the concepts of comprehensiveness and universality.<sup>33</sup> This will shed further light on the links between traditional and contemporary Islamist political theories.

*Traditional Islamists:* Ibn Taymiyya argues that Islam is superior to the other two revealed religions (Judaism and Christianity) because the latter proclaim religion without striving to achieve “the conditions necessary for its existence: power, jihad, [and] material resources.”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, he believes that the political organization of the Muslim community “is superior to that of any state.”<sup>35</sup> Ibn Khaldun, like Ibn Taymiyya, believes in the superiority of Islam over other divinely revealed religions, and in his well-known book, *The Muqaddimah*, he states:

In the Muslim community, the holy war is a religious duty, because of the universalism of the Muslim mission and the obligation to convert everyone to Islam either by persuasion or by force.... The other religious groups did not have a universal mission, and the holy war was not a religious duty to

them, save only for the purpose of defence.... They [Christians and Jews] are merely required to establish their religion among their own people.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun places Muslim religious laws above all other laws because he believes them to be more comprehensive, as they touch both worldly and spiritual affairs.<sup>37</sup> This notion of superiority was endorsed by Abd al-Wahhab (who can be considered a bridge between traditional and contemporary Islamists) who asserted that the Islamic *umma* (nation) represented the pinnacle of excellence in comparison to other religions.<sup>38</sup>

*Contemporary Islamists:* According to Mawdudi, Islam has defined and established essential universal rights not only for Muslims but for humanity as a whole. On this basis, then, he encouraged “revivalists” to initiate a universal movement. He pointed out that the aim of such a movement is to enable Islam to become a superpower and a cultural hegemonic force to capture the moral and intellectual political leadership of mankind.<sup>39</sup> In addition, neo-Islamists believe that Islamic principles and practices are capable of solving all of the problems of human life. They argue that the Islamic system extends into all aspects of life; it discusses all minor and major affairs of mankind; it provides order to human affairs; it is not only comprehensive and perfect, but also realistic and constructive.<sup>40</sup>

This comparison of the views of traditionalists and neo-Islamists demonstrates a strong link between early and contemporary Islamists in their approach to the concepts of universalism and comprehensiveness. The acceptance of the comprehensive and universalistic nature of Islam led them to believe in the superiority of their faith over all others. For example, Qutb insists that “all humanity is in need to us; to our beliefs; to our principles; to our laws and our system.”<sup>41</sup> He states that it is the duty of Islam to annihilate all other systems because they are not only obstacles in the way of universal freedom, but also other societies do not give Muslims any opportunity to organize according to their own methods.<sup>42</sup>

Similar arguments can be seen in the writings of leading Iranian Shi’a figure, Ayatollah Mutahhari, who sees Islam as superior to other religions. He dismisses Christianity as comprising merely a few moral teachings while Islam is “a religion that sees its duty and commitment to form an Islamic state. Islam came to reform society and to form a nation and government. Its mandate is the reform of the whole world.”<sup>43</sup> For Islamists, Islam is not only a religion, it is a comprehensive system to govern all public, social, and political life.

### *The Necessity of Islamic Government*

Before exploring the links between traditional and contemporary Islamists in regard to the necessity of an Islamic government and social order, several points need to be clarified. First, this is a very important subject because it is one of the basic principles used by Islamists to politicize their faith. Second, it is essential to note that the terminology used by traditionalists and that used by contemporary Islamists is slightly different. For example, traditional Islamists used caliphate or *imamate* as the main political and religious institutions in the Islamic state, while contemporary Islamists have adopted modern terms such as “state” and “parliament.”

*Traditional Islamists:* Ali bin Muhammad al-Mawardi (974-1058) stated that “God... ordained the caliphate of the Prophet through whom He protected the people; and He entrusted government to him, so that the management of affairs should proceed [on the basis of] right religion... and affairs of common interest were made stable.”<sup>44</sup>

Regarding the necessity of government, Ibn Taymiyya (in his political treatise *al-Siyyasa al-Shar’iyya*) bases his argument on two verses in the Koran. The first verse reads, “Surely Allah commands you to make over trusts to their owners and that when you judge between people you judge with justice; surely Allah admonishes you with what is excellent; surely Allah is Seeing, Hearing.” The second verse is: “Oh you who believe! Obey Allah

and obey the Messenger and those in authority from among you; then if you quarrel about anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you believe in Allah and the last day; this is better and very good in the end.”<sup>45</sup>

For Ibn Taymiyya, governing the affairs of the Muslim community is a religious requirement, because religion--without control of government--cannot survive, and he believes that the exercise of authority is a religious function.<sup>46</sup> Enforcing Islamic law is seen by Ibn Taymiyya to be another reason for an Islamic form of government, and he bases this on the belief that God ordered the Muslim community to “enjoin the good and forbid evil.” He says, “People are in need of a book to guide them, and a victorious sword; the book represents justice and the sword represents force, and human life depends on both of them.”<sup>47</sup> Another traditionalist, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292- 1350) also argued that politics is part of religion, and government is founded on the justice of God and Muhammad.<sup>48</sup>

*Contemporary Islamists:* Fear of waning Islamic values and the need for Shari’a are seen by neo-Islamists as the main reasons for having an Islamic state. Without a state, Qutb argues, all values are unstable, and similarly the morals based on those values remain unstable.<sup>49</sup> More significantly, in regard to the links and similarities between contemporary Islamist political theory and traditional Islamist political ideas, al-Qaradawi and Abd al-Karim Zedan, two leading contemporary Islamist theoreticians, have used the same argument espoused by Ibn Taymiyya to justify the establishment of Islamic government (see above).<sup>50</sup>

It is clear from the above passages that both traditional and contemporary Islamists believe that the establishment of an Islamic state is vital because, as they claim, the existence of religion and the world are both dependant on the existence of a government, or more precisely, an Islamic order. This highlights another parallel between the political theory of traditional and neo-Islamists and is an indication that the process of politicization of Islam is an old phenomenon. In the next

section this argument will be further illustrated.

### ***State and Religion: Politicization of Islam***

Both traditional and neo-Islamists believe in the inseparability of state and religion. In the following section this concept is not debated, however, their respective notions of state and religion, and the conditions that have been laid down for Islamic rule by both traditional and contemporary Islamists, will be examined for possible links.

*Traditional Islamists:* Al-Mawardi and Ibn Taymiyya identified the duties of the caliph as follows: to maintain the religion, to execute judgment between claimants, to protect the house of Islam, to implement Shari’a, to guard the frontiers, to undertake jihad, to appoint advisors, to collect taxes, to pay salaries, and to oversee community affairs personally, to lead the Friday prayer, the performance of pilgrimage, and the celebration of religious festivals.<sup>51</sup>

It is obvious that for traditionalists the caliph and the institution of the caliphate are seen to be the bearers of all state duties--legislative, executive, and judicial. It is noteworthy that of all these duties only a few are religious. Additionally, al-Ghazali adds as duties to be commander of the Muslim army and leader of all formal religious observances.<sup>52</sup> As regards the qualifications for being appointed caliph, most traditionalists have stressed that he should be a just person, possess religious knowledge, and be able to make independent judgments on points of law; in other words, to be mujtahid. Also, he has to be a mature male and a Muslim.<sup>53</sup>

In regard to the relationship between religion and state, in his major work on politics, *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya (The Ordinances of Government)*, al-Mawardi conceives of the caliphate as a form of government that safeguards the ordinances of the Shari’a and its implementation. Moreover, al-Ghazali also argued that religion and power were, from the beginning, “indissolubly interrelated.” In a similar vein, Ibn Taymiyya insists that state and religion are inseparable,

because their separation eventually leads to dissension.<sup>54</sup> By the same token, Abd al-Wahhab argues that Islam forbids “separating the religion from any matters of life, including politics and law.”<sup>55</sup>

*Contemporary Islamists:* Concerning the question of state and religion, the only difference between contemporary Islamists and traditionalists is that the former use the term “Islamic state” instead of “caliphate”; but they, too, list the above-mentioned duties of caliph, including the need to safeguard the Muslim community and to implement Shari’a.<sup>56</sup> Like the traditionalists, al-Qaradawi and al-Banna both argue that a Muslim ruler must be a scholar in Shari’a, and his knowledge of Islamic regulations needs to be equivalent to that of a mujtahid.<sup>57</sup>

Likewise, Mawdudi identifies the qualifications for rulers and office bearers. He suggests that they have to possess those qualities prescribed by Islam, such as to be a Muslim, male, adult, and a citizen of an Islamic state.<sup>58</sup> It is evident that the qualifications identified by contemporary Islamists are almost identical to those of traditional Islamists. However, it is relevant to point out that when Mawdudi says those “qualities prescribed by Islam,” he refers to the ones prescribed by traditionalists, because neither the Koran nor the Sunna defined the necessary qualities.

### ***Jihad and Takfir***

Takfir, or repentance, is the practice of declaring that an individual or a group previously considered Muslim(s) is/are in fact *kufar* (non-believers in God), and in some cases legalizing the shedding of their blood. Historically, takfir and *hijra* (migration) are terms that refer to when Muhammad considered the people of Mecca to be infidels, thus leaving the city and going to Medina instead. The recent use of these terms and concepts was introduced by an Egyptian radical organization, al-Takfir wal-Hijra (Repentance and Holy Flight), which accuses any society of being infidel if it does not follow the Shari’a—even if that society

observes Islamic rituals. In the view of that organization, the only solution for believers is to flee the infidel community and call for jihad against it.

*Traditional Islamists:* The concept of jihad has been used since the earliest years of the religion. Indeed, the use of jihad and takfir precedes the appearance of jurists, ulama, and traditional Islamists. For example, shortly after Muhammad’s death, the Khawarijis justified their fight against Caliph Ali, whom they considered to be an infidel because, they said, he transgressed Islamic precepts. They considered all non-Khawarijis (and even those Khawarijis who had not joined their camp) as *mushrikun* (polytheists) and *kuffar* (infidels).<sup>59</sup>

A similar argument was developed by Ibn Taymiyya against the Tatars, for although that group had embraced Islam, he denounced them as apostates because they failed to implement fully the Shari’a. Ibn Taymiyya’s strict and literal interpretation of the Koran established him as the pioneer of Islamic extremism. He was one of the first Islamists to introduce the notion of migration from the House of Infidels to the House of Islam.<sup>60</sup> He also believed that all lawful warfare was essentially jihad, and since its aim was to assert the supremacy of God’s word, those who stood in the way of this aim must be fought.<sup>61</sup>

One of Ibn Taymiyya’s students, Ibn Qayyim, meticulously followed his teacher’s steps and, after the Khawarijis, was one of the first to introduce the concept of takfir and to set out a procedure for jihad. In his book *Zad al-Mi’ad*, he argues that:

God Commanded the Prophet Muhammad to *migrate* to Medina. After his arrival into Medina, he was given *permission* to fight. Then he was *instructed* to fight against those who fought him and to restrain himself from those who did not make war with him. Later he was *commanded* to fight the polytheists until God’s religion was fully established.<sup>62</sup>

For traditionalists, jihad could be against infidels or believers. Both al-Mawardi and Ibn Taymiyya divided jihad into two categories: jihad against unbelievers and jihad against believers. The latter were further divided into apostates (or innovators), rebels, and brigands.<sup>63</sup> In addition, he considered the Shi'a and those who doubted their version of Islam to be infidels. In a similar vein, Abd al-Wahhab argued that the Shi'a beliefs and worships were forms of infidelity. Indeed, in terms of takfir, no Islamist is as extreme as Abd al-Wahhab. In his major book *Kitab al-Tawhid*, he asserts that only those who subscribe to his version of religious orthodoxy are the true and faithful believers, and he dismisses almost everybody else--Muslims and non-Muslims alike--as infidels.<sup>64</sup> From the above remarks, it is clear that both jihad and takfir were central to Islamist political arguments, and they were justified against both believers and non-believers. The question now is how neo-Islamists approached these two concepts and how much they relied on traditional theories.

*Contemporary Islamists:* Qutb's understanding of jihad is a precise copy of Ibn Qayyim's approach (see above). Qutb stated that the Muslims were first *restrained* from fighting, then they were *permitted* to fight; later they were *instructed* to fight against the aggressors, and finally they were *commanded* to fight against all polytheists.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Qutb rejects any other understanding of the concept of jihad in Islam, describing those who say "jihad is a defensive war" as "narrow-minded" and "treacherous Orientalists." He also believes that "striving through *sayf* (sword) is to clear the way for striving through preaching."<sup>66</sup>

Justifying jihad against believers is evidence that the concept of takfir, as used by contemporary Islamists, is not new. It is apparent from the above that al-Mawardi and Ibn Taymiyya legitimized war against believers by labelling them "innovators," "rebels," or "brigands." The difference between traditionalists and contemporary Islamists is presumably the accused group's position within the state. In early Islam, such groups

were normally in opposition to the state, but today the accused groups normally support the state--and sometimes are the state itself.

This is the possible explanation for al-Banna and Qutb both calling for jihad against authorities. Indeed, Qutb adopted the extreme view that the nation of Islam ceased to exist once Muslims submitted the governance of his affairs to men. He argued that as long as a society does not live by the Shari'a, it is in a state of *jahiliyya* (ignorance), even if its members believe in God and observe the rituals of worship.<sup>67</sup> The influence of Ibn Taymiyya's accusation against the Tatars provided Qutb with the ingredients to reject Egyptian society. Another similarity between traditional and neo-Islamists is that both groups have specified the stages of jihad, which they define as follows: first, an invitation to embrace Islam; second, if the invitation is rejected then jihad needs to be undertaken without warning; and third, they should be fought until they either convert to Islam or accept to pay *jizya* (poll tax).

### ***The Status of Women and the Status of Non-Muslims***

To identify links in the approaches and understandings of traditional and contemporary Islamists in regard to women's rights is a difficult task, because traditionalists rarely mentioned this issue. Their silence on the subject may have been because it was not considered a matter worthy of comment or because they took for granted a subordinate status for women and did not feel any need to justify it. Either way, this can be understood best if it is considered in its historical context, for the world then was a man's world only. In considering this matter, the status of non-Muslims will also be discussed to further highlight similarities between both traditional and neo-Islamist standpoints.

*Traditional Islamists:* Al-Mawardi argues that it is possible for a non-Muslim to hold high office (such as *vizier*, minister) in an Islamic state as long as his duties are of the *tanfiz* (executive) category.<sup>68</sup> However, Ibn Taymiyya had a different view; as a strict



follower of salaf, he demanded the application of the regulations set by Umar (the second caliph, r. 634-644), which barred non-Muslims from any political or military positions.<sup>69</sup> In fact, most traditionalists, such as al-Ghazali and Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Ibn Jama'a (1241-1333), stressed that the requirements for being a caliph or imam are to be male and a Muslim.<sup>70</sup> In other words, the caliph should not be a female or a non-Muslim. This is as far as women's status and rights were defined, however, as noted above, non-Muslims were certainly not treated equally and were required to pay jizya as the price for their protection by the Islamic government. For example, Abd al-Wahhab asserts that if non-Muslims refuse the call of the Muslim Commander to Islam, he must order them to pay the jizya or else fight them.<sup>71</sup>

*Contemporary Islamists:* Mawdudi argues that Islam seeks to eliminate discrimination based on color, race, nationality, blood, and lineage; but on the question of religion, he divides human beings into two parties: "the party of God" who are Muslims, and "the other party" who are non-Muslims.<sup>72</sup> In addition, he says that Islam prescribes two types of citizenship: Muslims and *dhimmi* (non-Muslims), and only Muslims have the right to hold "the post of the head of the Islamic state," to be a "member of parliament," or to occupy "key positions."<sup>73</sup> Moreover, Mawdudi and Zedan name those who are not eligible to vote in an Islamic state, and they include non-Muslims with children and the mentally ill.<sup>74</sup> It is relevant to point out that Zedan uses the term "crazy" in place of "mentally ill," and in so doing he thus categorizes non-Muslims with "crazy" people. Al-Banna suggests that the authority of a Muslim state should not be entrusted to non-Muslims, because this would enable them to gain general power.<sup>75</sup>

The Islamist view on non-Muslim participation in parliament is similar to the view on women, whom they consider to be second-class citizens unworthy of holding any leading political post, such as that of president or prime minister. They insist that parliamentary seats for both non-Muslims and

women should be limited in number, and that non-Muslims should be excluded from judicial matters.<sup>76</sup> For contemporary Islamists, women's main responsibility is to bring up children, as suggested by Qutb, and if a society permits women to work in a job outside the home then that community should be considered jahiliyya.<sup>77</sup>

Under the pressure of current changes in the Islamic world regarding reform and democratization, al-Qaradawi approaches the role and the status of women in society more diplomatically. He is aware that he cannot deny them basic rights, such as nomination to public office and government, but he still marginalizes them and limits other rights so that they remain second-class citizens in society. Al-Qaradawi's view is that women should be allowed to be elected to parliament, but their numbers should not exceed those of men; as long as men have the majority they need not worry about women overpowering male authority.<sup>78</sup>

As stated above, it is difficult to discern similarities between traditional and contemporary Islamists in regard to the status of women. However, contemporary Islamist denial of women's rights could be linked to their disregard by traditionalists. Moreover, in relation to the status of non-Muslims, there are clear links between the views of the two groups as examined above.

The significance of identifying the theoretical links and/or parallels between the ideologies of past and present Islamists is in showing to be incorrect the argument that Islamism is a new phenomenon, as proposed by Ayubi, Amin, and Tibi (see above), and that the process of politicization of Islam goes back to the first centuries of Islam, especially after the emergence of the first traditional extremists.

## **EXTREMISM IN ISLAM: PAST AND PRESENT**

It is worth noting that not all Islamists (traditional or contemporary) hold extreme views. Following is an examination of this point, with particular focus on the most

prominent writers. The emphasis will be on three well-known traditional Islamists, Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim. Of contemporary Islamists, the focus will be on the ideas of Qutb, by far the most extreme. The attention will be on two interesting influences on their extreme ideas, as a response to personal persecutions and invasions.

### ***Persecution of Islamic Thinkers and Extremism in Islam***

Throughout history the relations between Islamic rulers and ulama and jurists (including Islamists) have generally been good. The Islamists' main political role has been to justify and legitimize the ruler's authority.<sup>79</sup> However, there have been exceptions, and some Islamists have paid a heavy price for their beliefs and their political and theological standpoints, several suffering imprisonment, persecution, and torture. Such experiences seem to have had profound impacts on their views.

*Traditional Islamists:* In 833, the Abbasid Caliph, Abdallah al-Ma'mun ibn Harun (786-833), officially supported the theological doctrine of the creation of the Koran. The debate as to whether the Koran was eternal or temporal and created had led to fierce disputes and to the persecution of adherents of the opposing positions.<sup>80</sup> The Mu'tazila, a Muslim theological sect influenced by the rationalist methods of Hellenistic philosophy, taught that God was an absolute unity admitting of no parts. This rationale was brought to bear on the problem of God's word, the Koran, because the word is God and not a part of Him; that is, the Koran, as a written expression and thus a material thing removed from God, had to be created by God in order to be accessible to man. In contrast to this view, traditionalists, such as Ibn Hanbal, held that the Koran was uncreated and external, that it had existed along with God since the beginning of time. The debate led to the persecution of Ibn Hanbal and his followers. Hanbal was beaten and imprisoned by Abbasid

authorities, though later released under pressure from his supporters.<sup>81</sup>

Another prominent traditionalist was Ibn Taymiyya. Born in Harran in 1263, he lived through one of the most turbulent periods in Muslim history. At the age of six his father took refuge in Damascus after the community was displaced by Mongols. However, they were under constant threat, and internal dissent was destabilizing their religion. Repeatedly imprisoned because of his stance against invasion, he spent his last two years in jail, where he was actively involved in writing until deprived of pens and papers by his jailers.<sup>82</sup>

More importantly, Ibn Taymiyya and most extremist Islamists were born into sociopolitical situations where Muslims in general, and Islamists in particular, suffered greatly. Ibn Taymiyya was born when the Abbasid Caliphate had just been defeated by Mongol invaders. At that time, the Muslim community suffered defeat and humiliation (see next section), and jurists and ulama were subjected to torture and imprisonment, especially those who called for the end of invasion--among them the leading figures Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim.

*Contemporary Islamists:* In relation to jihad, in *Nahwa Mujtama Islami* (Towards an Islamic Society), Qutb argues that "it is not the ambition of Muslims to oblige others to follow Islam, but its object is that Muslims should be free to preach Islam and let others have the freedom of belief." In the same book, penned prior to his imprisonment and torture, he wrote that "the aim of jihad is to push away hostility without aggression." He concludes that the general principle is "no war" and war is only "with attackers." Furthermore, he stresses that Islam will not fight, boycott, or set itself against "polytheists."<sup>83</sup>

However, In *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (Milestones), he branded those who understood jihad as a "defensive war" as "narrow-minded" and "treacherous Orientalists."<sup>84</sup> It is clear from these lines that he had moved from a position of moderation to one of extreme intolerance and belligerence, especially regarding jihad. It is quite possible

that Qutb wrote *Nahwa Mujtama Islami* before his imprisonment and subsequent torture, because the language, tone, and approach to the concept of jihad is so profoundly bellicose in the later work. As a member of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1960s, Qutb suffered at the hands of the Egyptian authorities. Various witnesses reported the barbarism of the camp guards. Gilles Kepel writes, "It was then that he [Qutb] lost his last remaining illusion as to the Muslim character of Nasser's [the Egyptian president] regime."<sup>85</sup>

The suppression brought far-reaching changes to Qutb's ideology and in the means adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood in their struggle with the Egyptian government. The example cited here is only one instance of the changes in tone and language in Qutb's writings, and many others can be found by comparing his early and post-imprisonment works.

Both traditional and contemporary Islamists might have been pushed further because of what they experienced at the hands of authoritarian rulers. Many are drawn to political violence, as Dr. Jerrold Post, a political psychologist pointed out, "not purely from ideological consideration but also through personal and psychological factors."<sup>86</sup>

### ***Cultural and Military Invasion and Extremism in Islam***

In Muslim history there are many examples of Islamist resurgence, whether by communities or individuals. Individuals and nations respond differently to cultural and military invasion, but in Muslims it has engendered waves of extremism.

*Traditional Islamists:* As a result of Mongol invasion and the collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate in 1258, religious institutions were destroyed and many jurists and ulama were either killed or dispersed.<sup>87</sup> Extremist Islamists view the destruction of the Abbasid dynasty as an important turning point in Muslim affairs. The significance of militant Islamic political thought which emerged in the wake of the Mongol invasion cannot be underestimated. Ibn Taymiyya dedicated his

life to ending the Mongol occupation, and so obsessed was he that he declared jihad to be one of the pillars of Islam and more important than pilgrimage.<sup>88</sup> As a cultural example, the Mu'tazila trend in early Islam was considered by Islamists to be a symptom of undesirable foreign influences on Islamic values and culture.

*Contemporary Islamists:* Based on Ibn Taymiyya's approach, al-Banna argues that "Muslims are under the yoke of foreigners and are subjugated by infidels" and "in such circumstances it becomes the duty of each and every Muslim to wage jihad."<sup>89</sup> It is significant to point out that leading contemporary Islamists, such as Mawdudi, al-Banna and Qutb, lived in an era where most of the Islamic and Arabic world was dominated by Western powers. On the cultural front, a wide variety of examples can be cited, ranging from secular-oriented trends and movements (in some ways even Arab nationalism falls into this category) to Western films, books, and ideas about women's rights. Perhaps, that is why al-Qaradawi says "social and cultural invasion is more dangerous and even worse than political and military invasion, because it flays the nation from itself."<sup>90</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

Islamism is seen by some scholars as a reaction to modernism, Westernization, and industrialization, and therefore they argue that Islamism is a new phenomenon. By examining the views of Islamists from centuries ago--something contemporary Islamist thinkers have certainly done--we see, however, that this movement is a new wave in an old continuum.

Thus, contemporary Islamism is not a new phenomenon but one that has deep roots in the writings of traditional Islamists and in the experiences that both traditionalists and Muslim communities have encountered throughout history.

There are also, some significant differences. The point of departure between traditional Islamists and new Islamists is that the former often called for total obedience to authority in order to avoid *fitna* (strife).

However, for the latter, authority is often perceived to be un-Islamic and so they view disobedience as a justifiable form of struggle against tyranny, despite the possible resulting strife.

For traditional Islamists, religio-political affiliation was often within the framework of existing units of the schools of law, but for contemporary Islamists affiliation was often with organized political parties. Traditional Islamist movements were not sophisticated in terms of organization, however, contemporary Islamist movements are well-organized, sometimes clandestine, and usually better equipped both ideologically and logistically. This is the result of modern technology and methods--the internet being one key example--which contemporary Islamists are quite willing to use.

Further research would be quite useful to explore and identify differences between traditional Islamists and Islamists.

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<sup>11</sup>. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 156.

<sup>12</sup>. See Black, *The History*, p. 155.

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- <sup>18</sup>. Nimrod Hurvitz, "From Scholarly Circles to Mass Movement: The Formation of Legal Communities in Islamic Societies," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 108, No. 4 (2003), p. 990.
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- <sup>21</sup>. Ibid, p. 145.
- <sup>22</sup>. Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, *The Islamic Law and Constitution*, (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1969), p. 204.
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- <sup>24</sup>. Ibid, p. 29.
- <sup>25</sup>. See Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran, Article 56, [Uhttp://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/Government/constitution-5.html](http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/Government/constitution-5.html) (last accessed August 13, 2007).
- <sup>26</sup>. Lambton, *State*, p. 53.
- <sup>27</sup>. The Mu'tazila was a rationalist school founded in Basra and Baghdad, which attempted to interpret religious texts in the light of human reason. They also advocated the doctrine of free will. However, the Orthodoxies believed in a literal interpretation of texts, their main disagreement with Mu'tazilis was regarding the notion of the created and uncreated of Koran.
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- <sup>29</sup>. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, pp. 154-60.
- <sup>30</sup>. Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, "Political Theory of Islam," in Mansoor Moaddel and Kamran Talattof (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Islam: An Anthology of Modernist and Fundamentalist Thought* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 270-71.
- <sup>31</sup>. Khawarijis is a term used to describe those Muslims who initially supported the caliphate of the fourth Caliph Ali, but later rejected him. They first emerged in the late seventh century.
- <sup>32</sup>. Watt, *Islamic*, p. 54.
- <sup>33</sup>. For the debate on comprehensiveness nature of Islam see Sherko Kirmanj, "Islam, Politics and Government", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2008), p. 48.
- <sup>34</sup>. Black, *The History*, p. 155.
- <sup>35</sup>. Rosenthal, *Political*, p. 55.
- <sup>36</sup>. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 183.
- <sup>37</sup>. Ibid, p. 155.
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- <sup>45</sup>. Koran (4: 58-59).
- <sup>46</sup>. Rosenthal, *Political*, pp. 53-54.
- <sup>47</sup>. Black, *The History*, p. 155.
- <sup>48</sup>. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Turuq al-Hukmiya fi al-Siyyasa al-Shar'iyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Arqam bin Abi al-Arqam, 1999), pp. 39-40.
- <sup>49</sup>. Qutb, *Milestones*, pp. 29-30.
- <sup>50</sup>. Abdul Karim Zedan, *al-Fard wal-Dawla fi al-Shari'a al-Islamiyya* (Beirut: Mua'sasat al-Risalah, 1990), pp. 8-9; al-Qaradawi, *al-Sahwa*, p. 82; al-Qaradawi, *Min Fiqh*, p. 18.
- <sup>51</sup>. Lambton, *State*, pp. 91-92, 147; Rosenthal, *Political*, p. 29.
- <sup>52</sup>. Lambton, *State*, p. 111.
- <sup>53</sup>. Al-Ghazali, *Fada'ih al-Batiniyya*, pp.180-81; Ali bin Muhammad al-Mawardi, *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya* (Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, undated), p. 7.
- <sup>54</sup>. Lambton, *State*, pp. 127, 145.
- <sup>55</sup>. Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab, *Kitab al-Tawhid*, [Uhttp://www.islamicweb.com/beliefs/creed/abdulwahab/](http://www.islamicweb.com/beliefs/creed/abdulwahab/) (last accessed January 5, 2008), Chapter 37.

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