MERIA

UNITY THROUGH OPPOSITION: ISLAM AS AN INSTRUMENT OF RADICAL POLITICAL CHANGE

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In wake of the September 11 attacks, there has been a heightened focus on political Islam (or Islamism) as a global area of research. Yet, in spite of the view that political Islam is essentially internationally oriented in its outlook, the primary focus of Islamist groups is actually at the domestic level, as Islam is utilized as a political instrument to initiate radical political change within Middle Eastern states. These movements have arisen in reaction to attempts at rapid development and modernization which have not fulfilled the expectations of a majority of their populations. Urbanization, higher education, and the perception of relative material deprivation have led to feelings of alienation, frustration, and hence, a growing sense of powerlessness. Most individuals and groups disenchanted with the economic mismanagement and authoritarian political structures of Middle Eastern states have rallied around the Islamists. With an indigenous ideology, strong organization, and long-term strategy, the Islamists present themselves as the only credible alternative to the region's tired, inefficient, and repressive regimes.

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the majority of research on political Islam (also referred to as Islamism) has predominately focused on the movement's ideology and strategy on the international level. However, Islamists' primary target remains the domestic regimes of individual Muslim countries. Consequently, this paper will examine the various factors that account for the increase in support accorded the Islamists since the 1967 Six-Day War. Specifically, this article claims that their success is rooted in their appropriation of religious symbols, discourse, and language to express socio-economic grievances, utilizing them as instruments to enact radical internal political change. This has been achieved through a linking of interests and ideas both inside Islamic societies and at the individual level as well.

This article begins with a brief survey of contemporary Muslim societies. At the macro or systemic level, these societies exhibit certain common characteristics associated with the phenomenon of rapid development and modernization. Some important consequences of attempts at advanced modernization have included greater urbanization (or conversely a massive rural exodus), wider attainment of higher levels of education, and an increase in perceived material deprivatio n. Second, this has impacted the micro-level in terms of an individual's subjective perceptions and evaluations towards the system as a whole, leading to increased feelings of alienation, frustration, and a general sense of powerlessness. As a result, there are specific socio-economic groups within contemporary Muslim societies who have been more detrimentally affected by these recent developments. This article argues that what ultimately unites these sometimes very divergent individuals into a common cause that supports the Islamists is their shared animosity towards a ruling elite they believe to be solely

responsible for their grievances. Since the regime dominates all aspects of the political, economic, and social process, and forbids any opposition to and criticism of its rule, the state then becomes the exclusive target of those dissatisfied groups frustrated with what they perceive as corrupt, incompetent, and oppressive regimes. In fact, throughout its history, Islam has been seized upon by those groups seeking to radically restructure the existing socio-political order as an ideology of protest and an instrument of revolt.

FACTORS BEHIND SUPPORT

Islamist organizations should be viewed primarily as modern social movements whose success is rooted in their ability to mobilize the population towards a concrete goal.[1] Therefore, while the Islamists may espouse and articulate their message within a religious or moral framework, their support is predicated upon the particular socio-economic context of that society.[2] The individuals who support these groups do so not necessarily for religious reasons, but because they desire a radical restructuring of the current order, a change they believe can only be provided by contemporary Islamist movements. A case in point is the one state where an Islamist revolution triumphed. In Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini succeeded precisely because he created a flexible political organization which identified with individual socio-economic grievances, and not because he embarked upon a religious crusade obsessed with theological dogma.[3] Therefore, while Khomeini's message was viewed in the West as essentially that of a religious demagogue, he was, in fact, more interested in expressing the socio-economic concerns and aspirations of his followers.[4]

At the macro, or systemic level, there are a number of common features shared by the principal Muslim states that have contributed to the growth of political Islam. In its most rudimentary sense, these difficulties can be linked to the process of modernization or the attempts, not always successful, at rapid economic development. Therefore, many people who favor the Islamists' calls for a radical restructuring or overthrow of the contemporary political, economic, and social structure are stimulated in part by the side-effects of economic development, such as increased migration to urban centers and the acquisition of higher education. As a by-product of both industrialization and urbanization, they have become increasingly frustrated by what they perceive as the constrained nature of economic modernization within their own specific countries. In their view, economic development and modernization have not only led to greater social and cultural dislocation,[5] but also have failed to fulfill the promise of increased employment and status. In her overall analysis of contemporary Muslim societies, Nazih Ayubi states, "One of the characteristics of late, uneven, and dependent capitalist development is that the rates of growth in urbanization, education, and bureaucratization are never matched by similar rates of growth in industrialization."[6] As rapid economic development and modernization have universally demonstrated, the side effects of concentrated industrialization can be catastrophic and "provoke violent reactions and regressions."[7]

One of the most important consequences of rapid economic development has been the accelerated urbanization and a corresponding rural exodus that has occurred since the 1970s. As populations throughout the Muslim world increased exponentially and the land available to sustain rural populations continued to shrink, more and more people moved to the city in search of employment and the promise of a better future. Oliver Roy estimates that the entrance of millions of peasants into the city led to a threefold increase in the population of the great Muslim metropolises from 1970-1990.[8] Consequently, these new cramped conditions have led to severe overcrowding and massive housing shortages, and in these growing megacities and shantytowns increasingly even

the most basic of services--water, sewers, transportation--are either lacking or non-existent.[9] Not surprisingly, this has led many people to become progressively more disenchanted with a system which does not seem to properly attend to their growing needs.

In addition, increased levels of education, without a corresponding expansion in the number and quality of employment, is another factor leading to the growth of political Islam throughout the Muslim world. Many young Muslims attempting to find their way out of their current state of poverty and underemployment have sought higher education as a means to this end. Despite their hard work and parents' financial sacrifices, recent graduates have become increasingly frustrated by their inability to find the types of jobs they expected their new educational skills and status as graduates deserve. This problem was especially pronounced in Egypt because of Gamal Abdel Nasser's twin policies of free higher education and guaranteed state employment. As Carrie Rosefsky Wickham argues, such "paradoxical" polices led to a tripling of university graduates in Egypt between 1975 and 1985, making it difficult, if not impossible, for the state to absorb such an increase.[10] Consequently, many recent university graduates--not just those with general arts degrees, but individuals with science degrees, engineers, and doctors--along with their parents, have become very receptive to the Islamists' promises of overthrowing the current order and replacing it with what they perceive to be a more just and fair system.

A third consequence of rapid economic development and modernization is a general sense of material deprivation experienced by an ever-expanding proportion of the population. While attempts at widespread economic development create noticeable financial benefits for a portion of the population, modernization and the growth of urban centers have also led to increased feelings of relative material deprivation and disadvantage as many individuals have become more acutely aware of the promises of consumptionism and their corresponding inability to participate in the purchase of primarily western goods. This realization that there is a growing consumer society in which they cannot participate makes the West a primary target of their animosity; something the Islamists willingly exploit. Emmanuel Sivan has argued along these lines, writing that Islamic fundamentalism "is a reaction against a modernity that does not deliver even on its material promises. It creates a gap--or cognitive dissonance if you will--between Western-style consumerist expectations and 'Fourth World' production and per capita income."[11]

Ayubi summarizes the consequences of attempts at rapid economic development when she argues that "these [Islamist] movements have emerged not really as an expression of moral outrage against a modernization that was going 'too fast,' but rather as a reaction to a developmental process that was not going fast enough."[12]

In an examination of the micro or individual level, it is clear that subjective feelings, perceptions, and evaluations towards the existing political, economic, and social order help to determine a person's own perspective regarding the legitimacy of such a system. Most individuals who support the Islamists share general feelings of alienation from and frustration towards the current socio-political structure. A sense of alienation can arise from an unresponsive government and a continuing lack of political participation[13], while growing frustration can be rooted in several areas, such as unemployment, a lack of adequate housing,[14] cultural ambiguity or a loss of identity.[15] These feelings of alienation and frustration lead the individual to experience a general sense of marginalization at the hands of the regime and deprivation in relation to the wealthier segments of society. In other words, these feelings derive

from individuals' beliefs that they are increasingly powerless in contemporary society, with little or no control over the daily affairs of their own lives.[16]

In addition, systemic transformations occurring in contemporary society--urbanization, increased education, and relative material deprivation--have created rising, but unfulfilled expectations, leading to the disenfranchisement of many individuals within Muslim societies undergoing rapid change. A number of authors identify rising expectations, and the subsequent frustrations created when the promises offered through modernization remain unfulfilled, as an important factor in contributing to the Islamists' success.[17] Consequently, Islamist movements acquire a significant degree of their support from individuals who subjectively perceive that they form part of the "declining social stratum" of society.[18] According to Ayubi, backing for the Islamists is directly related to the growing frustrations caused by contemporary systemic changes in the Muslim world: "In a nutshell it can be argued that while the middle strata have been expanding in size and in proportion in most Arab societies, their rising expectations (stimulated in part by the acquisition of higher education and by the move to urban centers) are being severely frustrated because of the constrained nature of economic development in these societies."[19]

Gilles Kepel concurs with Ayubi regarding the state of contemporary Muslim society, especially in terms of an ever-increasing sense of powerlessness. The emphasis for Kepel, however, is more strongly placed on the individual's "loss of reference points" and "loss of identity" in a rapidly changing world as being the primary factor in the increased support for the Islamists.[20] Saleem Qureshi also examines this question of powerlessness when he writes, "The uprooted are often those psychologically least able to cope with the unknown and the strange, and the dislocation often results in alienation and loss of identity."[21]

Accordingly, it is not surprising that two groups who particularly have been drawn to the message of political Islam are the young and recent migrants to the city.[22] In a difficult and sometimes solitary existence, it is the Islamists who have assisted these individuals in their daily struggles. On the one hand, the Islamists have provided significant support through their establishment of a network of social services, which the state either refuses or cannot afford to provide.[23] On the other hand, the conservative-oriented social message of political Islam and its focus on traditional values in a rapidly changing world has been an important factor in providing comfort and, hence, increasing the legitimacy of the Islamists in the eyes of the masses. As John Esposito summarizes, "Many swept along in a sea of alienation and marginalization found an anchor in religion. Islam offered a sense of identity, fraternity, and cultural values that offset the psychological dislocation and cultural threat of their new environment."[24]

In the end, the common characteristic exhibited by those individuals that tend to support the Islamists' platform is the self-perception as victims or "losers" in the attempts at modernization and economic development; the repercussions of which are only accentuated in the current era of globalization. These individuals are driven by crowded conditions and a sense of anonymity, frustrations created by "wasted" educational opportunities, individual alienation, frustration, powerlessness, and their exclusion from the consumer society which they see just out of reach. As a result, they are often drawn to the single credible group that promises to deliver a fresh beginning and a new and more just system.

SOCIAL BASES OF SUPPORT

Since their re-emergence in the 1970s, Islamist movements have tended to receive the majority of their backing from four principal socio-economic groups. These four main bases of support are the state-employed petit bourgeoisie (i.e., civil servants), the under-employed intelligentsia, large numbers of young people,

especially students, and finally, recent rural migrants to the city. In other words, the Islamist movements acquire the bulk of their support from members of the ever-expanding middle and lower-middle urban classes.[25]

It may be surprising that one of the core supporters of contemporary Islamist movements in their battle to dismantle the regime are civil servants, since this group derives its very living from wages received from the state. Yet, for many of the most educated, frustrated by their seeming inability to make sufficient advancement or income, the civil service may be the only option for employment. The active support of civil servants was a prominent feature of the Islamist movement throughout the twentieth century. The civil service performed an instrumental role in the initial success achieved by Hasan al-Banna and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This was especially true during its period of rapid growth from 1932-1945.[26] The civil service still remains a fertile area of recruitment for the Islamist groups, forming one of their core constituents.[27]

The second segment of Muslim society that is especially overrepresented regarding its support of and membership in contemporary Islamist movements, is the under-employed, and perceived as under-paid, intelligentsia.[28] This group includes specific professions such as university professors and teachers, in addition to those under the more general designation of intellectuals, poets, and artists. As with civil servants, the intelligentsia have long supported the Islamist movements, constituting both a key component of the organizations' base and even actively assisting the early Brotherhood in disseminating their message to the masses.[29] Intellectuals, professionals, and teachers have continued to constitute a principal component of the Islamists' following over the past two decades.[30] More specifically, in his analysis of the Iranian revolution, Ervand Abrahamian shows how Khomeini deliberately sought the

support of the intellectuals in legitimizing his movement to the masses. In fact, teachers and intellectuals, along with students, were among the first groups to actively protest against the Shah's regime.[31]

The third group that has remained deeply supportive of the Islamists consists of the younger members of Muslim society (i.e., those under 25).[32] Many tend to be students, as demonstrated in the case of Iran in 1979, and therefore have acquired some level of higher education. As with both state employees/civil servants and intellectuals, students formed a key component of the Egyptian Brotherhood's support base prior to the 1952 Revolution.[33] This remains the case as certain scholars argue that the twin variables of youth and education determine to a great extent the likelihood that a specific individual will support an Islamist movement.[34]

It is probably not surprising that support among the younger segments of the population is high, since younger people in general tend to be more radical and seem more willing to take extremist positions than their elders.[35] Consequently, they have demonstrated a greater willingness to support the type of radical Islamist movement that has developed throughout the Middle East, especially in Egypt, in the post-1967 era. For Ismael and Ismael, an examination of the Islamic Liberation Organization (*Munazzamat al-Tahrir al-Islami*) confirms this fact.[36] Established in Egypt in the wake of the 1967 War by leader Dr. Salih Siriyya, most members were young, with a median age of 22, and were students or recent graduates (professionals).[37]

The final socio-economic group is the recent rural migrants who have left the countryside to live and work in the city.[38] As previously mentioned, this group, which tends to be underemployed and estranged in its new surroundings, has been especially receptive to the Islamist message of equality, justice and brotherhood being preached in the slums of

many Arab cities. Both the Islamists' traditional message, which resonates with their religious upbringing, and the sense of intimacy and belonging such organizations provide, has been important in drawing this group to the Islamists' cause. Michael Fischer argues that recent migrants to Iranian cities were especially crucial in the formation of the social bloc that supported Khomeini in his eventual overthrow of the Shah.[39]

UNITY THROUGH OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNING REGIME

It is critical to understand that the individuals and groups that tend to favor the Islamists do so less because of what the Islamists propose--the installation of a state ruled according to Islamic law (*Shari'a*)--and more based on what the Islamists actually oppose: the current ruling elites and their perceived domination over all facets of contemporary society.[40] It is this "unity through opposition" that allows all those disenchanted with the current regime to coalesce around the Islamists. Consequently, the Islamists have capitalized on the fact that they have been able to portray themselves as the only credible alternative to corrupt, inefficient, and sometimes repressive regimes.[41] According to Ayubi:

A wide variety of groups are attracted to the Islamist thesis because... [it] imparts a certain sense of intimacy and assurance, and because they also share with the militants a certain degree of antagonism towards the existing social order and the state that keeps it in place. The Islamic language therefore most fundamentally represents *a broad alternative system of meaning and power to the hegemonic system represented by the existing social-political order which inevitably marginalizes and/or alienates certain individuals and certain social groups.* To an extent, the details of the Islamic thesis become less important than the fact that it is a very different thesis from that advocated by the State.[42]

As Ayubi concludes, "[Thus] their sole objective [is] the defeating of the state and the dismantling of the current social order on which it is premised."[43]

In contemporary Muslim states, a principal reason why many authoritarian regimes have become the primary target of frustration for the middle and lower-middle classes is their monopolization over all actual and potential power bases through their complete domination of the state apparatus and civil society. In turn, this creates the impression that the current regime, either through corruption, mismanagement, or incompetence, is solely responsible for all the contemporary problems inflicted on these disaffected groups. Since the Islamist opposition is better organized, more efficient at providing alternative services, and represents an indigenous belief system, the Islamists are usually able to outperform the secular opposition by presenting themselves as the only legitimate alternative to the current ruling elite.[44] The fact that Islam represents a native ideological approach is especially important since the ability to "frame"[45] contemporary grievances through religious discourse and language has allowed the Islamists to eclipse the ability of other potential critics of the regime (i.e., Marxists, socialists, Nasserists, liberals, and others).

It should be added that there is one further factor that allows the Islamists, as opposed to the secular opposition, the greatest opportunity in challenging the power of the existing regime. This important difference is that Islamist groups throughout the Muslim world have had the benefit of using the mosque as a staging ground for organizing their movement and disseminating both their religious and political message to their followers. Thus, the mosque offers a unique opportunity to criticize the government and ruling regime, while remaining effectively beyond the control of the state (i.e., a type of sanctuary from governmental repression). The mosque has demonstrated its effectiveness in this context, as an organizer of anti-government

dissent and protest, in countries throughout the Middle East, such as Egypt, Iran, Algeria, and the Palestinian Authority.[46]

When examining the specific policies pursued by various Middle Eastern states, much of the hostility directed towards these regimes is based on the perception of incompetence and mismanagement on the part of the ruling elites and their failure to address the actual problems affecting a majority of their populations. In this sense, the dominant powers are seen as having created an atmosphere of political stagnation, through their inability to fulfill the expectations they themselves have created.[47] In turn, this failure to deliver the political 'goods' leads to the impression that the regime and its representatives are corrupt, distant, and inefficient. The fact that in many of these states the same leaders and/or party have ruled uninterrupted for several decades--the National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria, the National Democratic Party (NDP) in Egypt, the Ba'th party in Syria, or the royal families in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the Gulf states--reinforces the perception of the regime as overly bureaucratized and bloated, where nepotism, not merit, is the primary requirement for advancement.[48] For many in the middle class, the regime is viewed as nothing more than ineffectual centers of political patronage for party hacks and members of their immediate family.

It is clear that a crucial reason for this common perception of political stagnation and, consequently, the general radicalization of politics, has been the unwillingness of many Middle Eastern regimes to permit any type of legitimate opposition to its monopolistic control over the political process.[49] With "the omnipotent control of the authoritarian one-party nation-state" the norm in the Middle East,[50] all opposition to the ruling party has been coopted, dissuaded, and often, severely repressed. Most Middle Eastern regimes have demonstrated a reluctance to accept or tolerate

even moderate opposition to their rule. In certain cases, such as Egypt and Algeria, where governments have actively and severely repressed opposition movements, such groups often reply in kind. History has quite clearly demonstrated that violence begets violence, and repression leads to more extreme, radical, and violent responses on the part of the opposition.[51]

Economic policy is a second area where ruling elites have failed to adequately address the concerns of their citizens, leading to accusations of blatant economic mismanagement.[52] This is not to suggest that all parts of society have equally suffered from the economic policies pursued by the region's governments since the 1970s. The fact that many members of the upper echelons of society have become quite wealthy, accentuating and polarizing the gap between the haves and have-nots, only contributes to the perception among the masses that the current system is corrupt and therefore must be overthrown. As Qureshi argues: "The industrialization and economic reforms that have been instituted... have tended to make the rich richer and the poor poorer, if not in absolute terms then in relative terms."[53]

In the specific case of Egypt, one of the principal factors accounting for the growth of radical Islamist movements has been an increasing perception of relative deprivation among the masses. The economic policies pursued by Anwar Sadat in the 1970s, including his *'infitah'* or open door policy to foreign investment, led to a definite economic polarization of Egyptian society. While there was an absolute growth in the wealth of society overall, there was a segment of society--usually those close to the president--who did much better in relation to the general population.[54]

More generally, throughout the Middle East, such economic problems, and the corresponding accusations of mismanagement, were exacerbated with the decline of oil revenues in the mid-1980s. Not only did this lead to a retrenchment in government

expenditures on social services and other "necessities," but many individuals who had been working in the oil-rich Gulf had to return to jobs with substantially lower levels of pay, which led to declining standards of living. As a consequence of all these factors, many of the 'have nots' began to consider more radical options (i.e., political Islam) in an attempt to extract a more equitable distribution of wealth from the nation.[55]

The third area in which Muslim regimes have been criticized may be the most important for those Islamist groups that oppose the state. It is commonly held by a large segment of each country's population that the regime is directly responsible for the cultural and social deterioration perceived to be plaguing contemporary Muslim society. In fact, it is on the level of this cultural and social dislocation that certain authors, such as Sidahmed and Ehteshami, believe the Islamists have been most effective in advocating their more traditionally-oriented message.[56]

In examining this alleged deterioration of the cultural and social environment, the Islamists perceive the source of the problem as based on two interrelated causes. First, is the growing influence of western culture and the belief that the Muslim world is being polluted and even threatened by the materialistic, hedonistic, and secular ways of the West. This cultural invasion of the region by western beliefs and values has created an environment in which the Islamists have been able to portray themselves as the only group willing and able to defend traditional Muslim society from cultural annexation by the West.[57]

However, the Islamists assert that a second and more deadly assault is being perpetrated upon traditional Muslim societies. This more ominous threat is not waged by an external foe, but instead originates from within, from the newly 'westernized' elites ruling contemporary Muslim states. According to the Islamists, these elites have undergone a metamorphosis, blindly imitating the Western world in both its material orientation and belief

system.[58] In areas such as life-style, dress, sexual mores, and the media, Western customs and values are perceived as engaged in a continuous onslaught upon a more traditionally-oriented Muslim way of life.[59]

Of course, Islamists do not simply oppose specific governmental policies. Instead, they refute the regime's entire legitimacy and question its overall credibility, leading to what Bassam Tibi refers to as a general "crisis of legitimacy."[60] In fact, most of the Islamists' success has been based on their ability to de-legitimize both the various governments and their leaders. Such criticisms have only been exacerbated by regimes that appear incapable or unwilling to allow either limited political participation or create policies that can lead to sustained economic growth.

In some states, such as Egypt, attempts have been made to work outside the political structure (i.e., within civil society), since as Wickham makes clear, participation in politics can lead to "the risk of harassment, imprisonment, or worse."[61] In response, the ability of a regime to monopolize control over certain coercive agents of the state, such as the military, judiciary, and police forces, is sometimes less important than its capacity to dominate what tend to be specifically "private" realms, such as the content of education and the environment of intellectual development. Hence, through its ability to coopt the means of socialization and penetrate various associations, organizations, and institutions within civil society, these regimes have been able to integrate and control their populations, while maintaining at least a degree of popular legitimacy.

One specific example is the capacity of various regimes in the Middle East to assert their dominance over the religious establishment, which has been one of the reasons the regimes still retain some level of legitimacy and status within their societies. In Egypt, the *ulama*, or religious scholars, are in essence civil servants, with their wages provided by the state. In exchange for a decent salary and

greater influence on state radio and in the media, the *ulama* have been willing to back the regime and support the state's official line on religious matters.[62] As a result, the *ulama* have been coopted by the regime, assimilated, and turned into a pillar of the status quo powers.[63]

The last aspect to examine regarding the ruling elite and its all-pervasive dominance of the state and civil society involves the greater question of political ideology. In other words, have these regimes provided their people with a larger ideological context or meaning through which to live their lives? For example, in the West, liberal democracies promote ideas of individual freedom and the collective good as the fundamental principles necessary to mask inequalities and specific cases of blatant political, economic, and social injustice.

In the Muslim world, however, the biggest threat confronting the current ruling elite may be their inability to espouse a larger ideological meaning for the masses or, perhaps more accurately, the fact that their ideologies have emerged as bankrupt, meaningless, and essentially void. As a result, the ruling regimes have as much failed as the Islamist movements have succeeded in providing a more effective ideology by which to guide the lives of their followers. It is in this political and ideological vacuum created by the breakdown of current ideologies that the Islamists have been offered their greatest opportunity. Thus, the Islamists have presented the masses with the chance to believe in something beyond the mere exertion of power; namely, a belief in the ideas of equality, social justice, and brotherhood.

At this point, it should be noted that the downfall of the dominant ideologies of various Middle Eastern regimes did not suffer a long and slow decline. Instead, one definitive and "cataclysmic" event symbolized the bankrupt nature of the dominant ideas of nationalism, socialism, and Pan-Arabism that had arose throughout the Middle East in the two decades following the Second World War. Without

question, the 1967 Six-Day War, in which Israel was able to effectively crush the combined armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, caused such profound shock, disillusionment, and humiliation that large numbers of people suddenly became less willing to follow the belief systems these regimes were promoting.[64]

It has been the ability of Islamists to fill this ideological void that has helped contribute to their growth in the post-1967 environment. On the one hand, from strictly a religious perspective, in difficult times, when there is a questioning of faith, religion is often used as a comfort against the harsh realities of the external world. Of course, to many, the embracing of religion was seen to represent not just a comfort for the present, but also "a form of divine punishment" for the sins of the past.[65] As Mortimer argues, "In the eyes of many the defeat was a just punishment on the regime, and indeed on the nation as a whole, for the hypocrisy, for the neglect of the *Shari'a*, the whoring after false Gods and foreign ideologies, which characterized the whole of the preceding period."[66] As Israel entered the old city of Jerusalem in June 1967, there was a widespread belief that the Jews had been successful because they had been "truer to their religion than the Arabs had been to theirs."[67] On the other hand, with the ideology of the contemporary regime discredited and the creation of a political and ideological vacuum, Islam was now capable of becoming a political ideology, providing much needed solutions to the problems and failures of the current regimes.[68]

In the opinion of many people in the Muslim world, the nearly 40 years since 1967 have only more clearly demonstrated that the regimes throughout the region remain ideologically bankrupt, certain of only one goal: their desire to maintain power. Moreover, the unwillingness of these regimes to permit even a moderate degree of political opposition or limited public participation reinforces the view

that a significant ideological vacuum remains. Therefore, through its ability to unify the very diverse groups that, above all else, seek the overthrow and destruction of the existing political and social order, only the Islamists appear capable of providing the ideological, organizational, and administrative means necessary to bring about such radical political change.[69]

ISLAMISM: AN IDEOLOGY OF PROTEST AND AN INSTRUMENT OF REVOLT

In its most basic sense, political Islam should be seen as an ideology of protest. Thus, political Islam is the beacon around which all those groups most detrimentally affected by the existing order converge in their denunciation of the current regime. While the Islamists may incorporate the symbolism, language and discourse of Islam to legitimize their claims, their real-life grievances are social, economic and, most importantly, political. In other words, it is power and control that they desire most.[70] As R. Hrair Dekmejian argues, "No less significant has been the role of Islamic fundamentalism as an ideology of protest against arbitrary rule and socioeconomic injustice. In the absence of other institutional and ideological channels of opposition, fundamentalism has provided a religiously sanctioned means for the articulation of popular dissatisfaction."[71]

This contemporary view of Islam as a vehicle for political protest is not new. Throughout its history, Islam has been utilized both by leaders to legitimize their rule, and by revolutionaries to denounce it.[72] Islam's popularity, and the recurring themes of social justice, equality, and the ending of oppressive structures and systems, has given Islamism the opportunity to synthesize its role as both an emancipatory ideology and a vehicle of political protest. One only needs to examine the earliest history of the infant Muslim polity to observe Islam being employed as an ideology aimed at restoring what was believed

to be the true doctrine of the faith, while at the same time attempting to overthrow the existing political order. According to Dekmejian, "[P]resent-day Islamist societies emulate the pattern of early insurrectionary groups by using politicized Islam as an ideology of protest against ruling elites who are charged with deviating from the true faith. Indeed, beginning with the Kharijites and the Shiites, fundamentalism became the ideology of opposition against those in power."[73]

Theoretically, contemporary Islamists had a much more difficult time discovering historical justification for their revolutionary doctrine since Sunni political theory clearly assumed the position that "even an unjust ruler was better than strife and the dissolution of society."[74] This is where the works of Ibn Tamiyya (1260-1327) were used to justify the overthrow of a ruler based on his non-compliance with the *Shari'a*.[75] In other words, "a Sunni ruler becomes illegitimate if he does not apply a substantial part of the *Shari'a*."[76] It were these types of arguments that were seized upon by contemporary Islamists, such as Abd al-Salam Faraj (leader of the al-Jihad Group which assassinated Sadat) in their justification of a Sunni-style revolutionary doctrine with its roots in Islamist political thought.[77] Contemporary Islamists now had the philosophical legitimacy they sought in justifying the overthrow of current leaders who refuse to rule in the shadow of the *Shari'a*. As an instrument of revolt, they maintain that they are simply fighting the same non-Islamist and foreign rulers who have consistently plagued the history of an otherwise peaceful and just Islamist state.

CONCLUSION

By examining the principal factors accounting for the growth of contemporary Islamist movements, the main argument is that while utilizing religious symbols and Islamic discourse, the primary objectives of the Islamists remain explicitly political. In addition, in spite of the heightened focus in the West on

the international aspects of Islamist ideology and radical Islamist groups, these movements remain primarily orientated towards their domestic environments. In this sense, Islam is utilized principally as a tool or instrument to initiate radical internal political change through the overthrow of the current regime and the destruction of its political, economic, and social power. Both the specific policies conducted by contemporary governments and their total domination over the state and civil society have contributed in unifying those groups most detrimentally affected by the current environment (i.e., the casualties or "victims" of modernization) into supporting what they perceive as the only practical alternative to this hegemonic control. Thus, it is this unity through opposition that has thrust the Islamists to the forefront of the current political struggle. With its historical roots as an ideology of protest and instrument of revolt, Islam has an advantage over other movements and ideologies which seek to radically transform the existing political order. Only Islam is perceived as a legitimate and indigenous option available to those disadvantaged segments that link both their interests and ideas into a concrete agenda for change and an alternative vision of a better and more just future.

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Carmichael (ed.), From Philosophy to Politics: Essays in Memory of Dimitrios S. Panopolis *(Edmonton: University of Alberta, 2004).*

NOTES

[1] Some recent works do an excellent job of linking recent Islamic activism with the new research originating from social movement theory. Two examples include: Quintan Wiktorowicz, (ed.), *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004) and Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

[2] As Mahmud Faksh asserts, "Islamism is basically an indigenous response to prevalent socioeconomic and political problems." Mahmud A. Faksh, *The Future of Islam in the Middle East: Fundamentalism in Egypt, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia* (Westport: Praeger, 1997), p. xii. Also see Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Methodology and Modern Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 125.

[3] Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 3.

[4] For an excellent examination of this point see Benjamin Smith, "Collective Action With and Without Islam: Mobilizing the Bazaar in Iran," in Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism*. In demonstrating the links between the *ulama* and the bazaar, Smith argues that the association was not solely motivated by religion and, hence, was more a temporary alliance based on a "convergence of grievances." See Smith, especially pp. 186 and 201.

[5] Ayubi asserts that contemporary Islamic movements should be seen primarily as "the moralist/culturalist expression of a developmental crisis." Nazih Ayubi, *Political*

Islam: Religion and Politics (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 158. For other examples, see Saleem Qureshi, "Political Implications of Fundamentalist Islam," in Janice Gross Stein and David B. DeWitt (eds.), *The Middle East at the Crossroads: Regional Forces and External Powers* (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1983), p. 76; and Sivan, *Radical Islam*, p. 125.

[6] Ayubi, *Political Islam*, p. 171.　　　　　(Bo

[7] Daryush Shayegan, *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West* (London: Saqi, 1992), p. 84.

[8] Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (trans. by Carol Volk) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 55. In Tehran alone, Roy states the population increased from 3 to 9 million over this period.

[9] Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Introduction: Islamic Activism and Social Movement Theory," in Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism*, p. 7.

[10] Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, p. 38.

[11] Sivan, *Radical Islam*, p. 11. Roy makes a similar point, suggesting Islamic movements are a response of "the oppressed of all countries… [who] dream of access to the world of development and consumption from which they feel excluded." Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, p. 52.

[12] Ayubi, *Political Islam*, pp. 176-77.

[13] John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 15.

[14] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[15] Qureshi, "Political Implications of Fundamentalist Islam," p. 77.

[16] Conversely, part of the Islamists' success is their ability to create a sense of "empowerment" among its supporters, or what Wickham calls "physical empowerment." See Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, "Interests, Ideas, and Islamist Outreach in Egypt," in Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism*, p. 244; and Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, pp. 153, 170.

[17] In her studies on recent Egyptian graduates, Wickham mentions that many university graduates were unwilling to do menial jobs that they felt detrimentally affected their social status or prestige; jobs they believed that were "beneath their station" or a "blow to their dignity (*karama*)." Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, pp. 54, 58, and 62.

[18] Youssef Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), p. 10.

[19] Ayubi, *Political Islam*, pp. 159-60. Emmanuel Sivan makes a similar point in examining the role played by "rising expectations," especially among the educated youth. According to Sivan, "The greater the expectations, the deeper the fall to the abyss of despair when the hopes failed to materialize." Sivan, *Radical Islam*, p. 125.

[20] Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and the Pharaoh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 217. Also see Wiktorowicz, "Introduction," pp. 11-12.

[21] 21. Qureshi, "Political Implications of Fundamentalist Islam," p. 77. Also see Sivan, *Radical Islam*, pp. 119-20; Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 217; and Ayubi, *Political Islam*, p. 168.

[22] The actual social bases of the Islamists' support will be examined more clearly in the next section.

[23] It is clear that one crucial factor accounting for the Islamists' success in the Middle East has been their ability to provide certain social services--health, education, welfare--that the mainstream regime either is unwilling or unable to provide. For a discussion of this crucial issue see Wiktorowicz, "Introduction,"pp. 11-12; and Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 17.

[24] Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, p. 16.

[25] In general, Richard Mitchell describes these groups as the "urban middle class." Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 329. According to Gilles Kepel, the degree of

success accorded various Islamist groups throughout the Middle East was based on their ability to link the interests of their two principal bases of support: "the young urban poor" and the "devout middle class." While such a strategy was highly successful in Iran, he argues that the Islamic Salvation Front's (FIS) eventual failure in Algeria was their inability to preserve such an "alliance" beyond the elections of 1991. See Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (trans. Anthony F. Roberts) (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

[26] Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, pp. 12-13. Also see Christina P. Harris, *Nationalism and Revolution in Egypt* (The Hague/London/Paris: Hoover Institute on War, Revolution, and Peace, 1964), p. 158; and Dilip Hiro, *War Without End: The Rise of Islamist Terrorism and the Global Response* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 61.

[27] Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, p. 12. Also see Malise Ruthven, *A Fury For God: The Islamist Attack On America* (London: Granta Publications, 2002), p. 115; and Ayubi, *Political Islam*, p. 161.

[28] In Egypt, Wickham claims that the Islamist groups, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, have garnered most of their success from what she terms the "lumpen intelligentsia." Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, p. 37.

[29] Mitchell, The Society of Muslim Brothers, pp. 283-84.

[30] For some examples see Lisa Anderson, "Fulfilling Prophecies: State Policy and Islamist Radicalism," in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism, or Reform?* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1997), p. 23; Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, p. 10; and Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, p. 12. Both Ruthven and Glenn E. Robinson argue that the Islamists, in terms of leadership, membership, and support, have been especially overrepresented among those professionals with applied science degrees, like medicine, and individuals with engineering degrees. See Ruthven, *A Fury for God*, pp. 112-14; and Glenn E. Robinson, "Hamas as Social Movement," in Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism*, p. 117. (It should be noted that Robinson's study focused specifically on the Islamist movement in the Palestinian Authority.)

[31] Abrahamian, Khomeinism, p. 53. It should not be surprising that in Iran, where Islamists control the government but have faired no better in providing for their urban citizens, it is again the students and intellectuals that have been among the most prominent opponents to the regime.

[32] Unquestionably, all those theorists who have examined in depth the main socio-economic bases of the Islamists' support focus on the "young" as the primary demographic group. Kepel's views have already been addressed regarding the "young urban poor." Kepel, *Jihad*, especially see pp. 6, 107, 127, 152, 159, and 168.

[33] See Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, pp. 12-13; and P.J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), p. 440.

[34] Kepel argues that education--even higher education--is more, not less likely to lead an individual into supporting radical Islamic movements. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 217. For some other examples see Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, p. 12; Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), pp. 403-04; and Ayubi, *Political Islam*, p. 161. These points were also examined in some detail in the previous section.

[35] From a macro or systemic level, certain authors argue that one common feature in those countries that have exhibited higher rates of support for the Islamists' cause, especially greater degrees of Islamic radicalism, are

countries with a larger percentage of young people. According to Kepel, 50 percent of Palestinians are under 15, while 70 percent are under 30, Kepel, *Jihad*, p. 152; while Mark Juergensmeyer's argues that Algeria's radicalized political environment is at least partially the result of the fact that 70 percent of the population is under the age of 25. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 191.

[36] The *Munazzamat al-Tahrir al-Islami* is probably best known for its 1974 seizure of a Technical Academy in Northern Egypt. It was hoped that such a brazen attack would spark a general uprising among the Egyptian masses.

[37] Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, *Government and Politics in Islam* (London: Pinter, 1985), p. 114.

[38] A number of authors focus on the importance of the link between a "rural background" and support for the Islamists' cause. For an example see Ruthven, *A Fury for God*, p. 113.

[39] Michael M. J. Fischer, "Imam Khomeini: Four Levels of Understanding," in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 162. Kepel argues that "young immigrants from the countryside" remained a key cornerstone of the Islamists' core constituency up to and during the Iranian revolution. See Kepel, *Jihad*, p. 108.

[40] Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, p. 189.

[41] 41. John L. Esposito, "Introduction," in Esposito (ed.), *Political Islam*, p. 3.

[42] Ayubi, *Political Islam*, p. 175 (emphasis added).

[43] Ibid., p. 161.

[44] Anderson, "Fulfilling Prophecies," p. 24.

[45] Wiktorowicz examines the importance of this issue of "framing" in terms of the Islamists' discourse. His main argument is that the Islamists have been the most successful in utilizing the symbols and language of Islam to construct shared "meanings" and "identities" as

the "basis of collective action." Wiktorowicz, "Introduction," pp. 2, 3, and 16.

[46] Gilles Kepel provides a good example of how the mosque has been utilized in the Islamists' struggle in Egypt. See Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, Chapter 6: The Sermons of Sheikh Kishk. Others authors also examine this issue including: Wiktorowicz, "Introduction," pp. 1 and 10; Robinson, "Hamas as a Social Movement," p. 126; and Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, pp. 131-33.

[47] Wickham's examination of the "paradox" between the Nasser policies of free higher education and guaranteed state employment, and the resulting frustrations, has already been examined. See Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, p. 38.

[48] Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, p. 52. In Wickham's interviews, a common complaint of Egyptian graduates, and a prime reason that they felt growing disillusionment with the regime, was their perception that nepotism and not merit was the only way one could hope to achieve decent paying government employment. The term she uses is "*wasta*" (i.e., right connections). See Wickham, "Interests, Ideas, and Islamist Outreach in Egypt," pp. 237-38; and Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, p. 62.

[49] While Ruthven mentions the existence of a "democratic deficit," Ruthven, *A Fury for God*, p. 281; and Mohammed Hafez argues about the deliberate exclusion of all "opposing voices," Mohammed M. Hafez, "From Marginalization to Massacres: A Political Process Explanation of GIA Violence in Algeria," in Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism*, p. 43; Diane Singerman goes so far as to refer to what she perceives as the actual "criminalization of politics." See Diane Singerman, "The Networked World of Islamist Social Movement," in Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism*, p. 160.

[50] Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* (Boulder: Westview, 1994), p. 114.

[51] In both Hafez, "From Marginalization to Massacres," and Mohammed M. Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Violence as Contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement," in Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism*, the main thesis is that the prime variable determining if an Islamist movement will utilize violence in their attempts to attain political power is whether the regime embarks on a strategy that is "reactive and indiscriminate" as opposed to "preemptive and selective."

[52] Abdulwahab Saleh Babeair, "Intellectual Currents in Contemporary Islam," *The Muslim World*, Vol.81, No.3 (1991), p. 234.

[53] Qureshi, "The Political Implications of Fundamentalist Islam," p. 77.

[54] For an example see Kepel, *Jihad*, p. 83.

[55] See Ismael and Ismael, *Government and Politics in Islam*, pp. 105-07. In many ways, this parallels the attraction socialism and communism held in the region during the mid-20th century.

[56] Abdel Salam Sidahmed and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Introduction," in Abdel Salam Sidahmed and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds.), *Islamic Fundamentalism* (Boulder: Westview, 1996), p. 7.

[57] See Mary-Jane Deeb, "Militant Islam and the Politics of Redemption," *The Annals of the American Academy*, Vol. 524 (November 1992), pp. 55-55.

[58] In their critiques against the Mubarak regime, many of more "radical" Islamists accused the Egyptian President of being "un-Islamic." According to Mahmud Abouhalima, one of the alleged masterminds of the 1993 World Trade Center bombings, "the character of many contemporary [Middle Eastern] politicians was deceitful: they pretended to be Muslim, but in practice followed secular--implicitly Western--codes of conduct." Abouhalima, as quoted in Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, p. 64. For some more general examples see Qureshi, "The

Political Implications of Fundamentalist Islam," p. 77; Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, p. 135; and in what Sivan terms "Westoxicated" Sivan, *Radical Islam*, p. 183.

[59] Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, p. 138.

[60] Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 8. Also see Najib Ghadbian, "Political Islam: Inclusion or Violence?" in Kenton Worcester, Sally Avery Bermanzohn, and Mark Ungar (eds.), *Violence and Politics: Globalization's Paradox* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 101.

[61] Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, p. 74. This is a core component of her overall thesis regarding the development of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the growth of its influence over the last two decades.

[62] See Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 20; Sivan, *Radical Islam*, p. 54; and Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 100. According to Wickham, to temper the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Mubarak regime has declared the *ulama* "the guardians of the *Shari'a*," while allotting them a prominent role in the formation of government policy. Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, p. 211.

[63] See Abu-Rabi M. Ibrahim, "Discourse, Power, and Ideology in Modern Islamic Revivalist Thought: Sayyid Qutb: A Review Article," *The Muslim World*, Vol. 81, No. 3 (July-October 1991), p. 294.

[64] Sivan, *Radical Islam*, pp. 47 and 131. See also Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[65] Kepel, *Jihad*, p. 63.

[66] Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power*, p. 285.

[67] Ibid., p. 286.

[68] Whether in terms of a religious answer or

political ideology, according to Mortimer, the one thing all could agree upon was that "the 1967 defeat had only demonstrated more conclusively the rottenness of the whole political and social order." Ibid., p. 288.

[69] As Kepel argues, in Iran, the Islamists succeeded primarily because of their ability to attract and "unite everyone with an axe to grind [who wanted to] bring down the established power." Kepel, *Jihad*, p. 118. Or, as he argues elsewhere, Islam has become the "weapon" or "vehicle" for all who desire an overthrow of the state and a destruction of the existing order. Ibid., p. 63.

[70] Faksh, The Future of Islam in the Middle East, p. 23.

[71] R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985), p. 176.

[72] See Sivan, *Radical Islam*, p. 165; and Ayubi, *Political Islam*, p. 62.

[73] Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution*, p. 38. The Kharijites were the first major sect to break from mainstream Islam. This occurred during the period of the Caliph Ali (657-661). Primarily consisting of economically alienated and marginalized segments of the population, they argued that those who did not follow the literal word of God as expressed in the Koran should be excommunicated from the community. Several authors draw parallels between the Kharijites and the contemporary Islamists. For some examples see Ayubi, *Political Islam*, pp. 4 and 125; Mortimer, *Faith and Power*, p. 62; Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 58; and Fouad Ajami, "In the Pharaoh's Shadow: Religion and Authority in Egypt," in James P. Piscatori (ed.), *Islam in the Political Process* (Cambridge; New York: Royal Institute Of International Affairs, 1983), p. 27.

[74] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 19.

[75] Ibn Tamiyya lived during the period of the Mongols' capture of the Muslim Caliphate in Baghdad. He was persuaded to declare a *fatwa* instructing jihad against the Mongol prince who was governing according to Mongol tradition at the exclusion of the *Shari'a.* Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 194. Also see Ismael and Ismael, *Government and Politics in Islam*, p. 19; and Ayubi, *Political Islam*, p. 33.

[76] Sivan, *Radical Islam*, p. 99.

[77] Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, pp. 193-94; and Sivan, *Radical Islam*, pp. 104 and 190. Admittedly, while Faraj may have gone further than his predecessors within the "radical" Islamist movement, he was really just following in the footsteps of other 20th century Islamists, such as Abu A'la Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb.