# Signposts on the Road to 9/11: Why the History of Islamism Still Matters

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# Contents

# Executive Summary

The attacks of 9/11 propelled Islamist terrorism to the top of the international security agenda, where it has remained for the past 20 years. Despite a sustained and coordinated military resistance, both the appeal of the ideology and the threat posed by violent and political Islamists have survived. Indeed, in places, the threat has been seen to proliferate. While this has led many in the West – from the political left and right – to call for an end to the "endless wars", complete withdrawal from Afghanistan and further disengagement from the Middle East will not end a struggle that has endured for generations.

Instead, 20 years on from 9/11, the West should recognise the following: the political, religious and cultural developments that gave rise to the attacks in 2001 stretch back many years; the struggle is ongoing but the mistakes of previous policies, and ways in which to change them, are today easier to discern; and the hope of a new and better Middle East and Muslim world can, even amid conflict and inevitable challenge, be identified with some optimism – if we truly understand the history and therefore frame the future correctly.

After decades of its instrumentalisation for a range of political projects, consensus over what is authentic Islam and what is a misuse of it has largely been lost. Fortunately, efforts are growing to redraw the lines and define a modern interpretation of Islam, but if the West is to support this then it must understand the journey so far. Only then can it become clear how 9/11 was a culmination of the political misuse of Islam, why Muslims around the world today still wrestle with Islamists to reclaim their faith, and what forces and ideas should be backed now if progressive voices are to succeed.

This paper therefore traces the significant sociopolitical events, debates and turning points that put the contemporary challenges still facing Muslim and Middle Eastern leaders, and thus their Western allies, into context. Once the history of the past century, at the least, is acknowledged and understood, then we can see how the Middle East and the Arab-Muslim world became hostages to two competing – and limiting – political ideologies from the 20th century onwards:

1. First, the **Arab nationalism** that emerged and came to dominate the era of postcolonial independence and efforts for self-determination. This form of nationalism was not religious but neither was it staunchly secular. It was a nationalist ideology driven by a belief that the Arab peoples were bound together by a common history and a shared language – and so should form an independent political bloc. By the 1950s, Arabism was both distinctly anticolonial and characterised by a broadly socialist agenda that emphasised state control, the redistribution of wealth, and social justice and reform in pursuit of national strength. While Islam remained an important element to appeal to the masses and sustain legitimacy, it was secondary to so-called Arabness. It attracted both spirited support and visceral opposition.

2. Second, the **pan-Islamism** that has since taken many forms but first emerged as a resistance to influential 19th-century Islamic modernisers who were attempting, at the time, to emulate European innovation and prowess while upholding the spirit of Islam, all with the ultimate aim of advancing Muslim communities in the modern era. As secular nationalism overtook Islamic modernism as the route to entry and relevance within the modern world, regressive Islamist ideologues monopolised the label of "authentic Islam" and spearheaded a return to traditions, gradually capitalising on the inevitable anxieties emerging in the rapidly changing period from after the second world war into the cold war.

There are critical lessons from the past that serve to clarify the dynamics still at play today:

1. **The divisions in Islam that matter most are not of sect but rather of attitude, between the progressive and regressive.** Although this division is real, and has been for centuries, it is not explicitly acknowledged in the Muslim world. A pervasive rhetoric and, at times, dogma of unity among Muslims in modern Islamic thought – driven partially by the belief that avoiding *fitna*, or sedition, is a religious obligation and partially by the mobilisation of the global *ummah*, or collective community, for political interests – has played its part in the failure to recognise the existence of this legitimate and real division. [1] And the divide between the progressive and regressive is one today that cuts through the overplayed Sunni-Shia sectarian split in public discourse.

2. **The struggle between these two competing forces in contemporary Islamic political thought has shaped the history of the modern Middle East – and will play a critical role in defining Islam's future.** The Islamic world encompasses myriad beliefs, orientations, interpretations, schools of thought and practices that reflect the rich cultural and intellectual heritage and diversity of global Muslim communities. Within this melting pot, however, there has always existed a spectrum of those who lean more towards conservatism and those who are more naturally liberal-minded. Throughout history, power and authority have oscillated between these two fundamental orientations.

3. **The extremist expression of a political Islam was neither inevitable nor a direct response to colonialism.** The origins of Islamism predate the colonial era and were in fact a) a reaction as early as the late 18th century to Muslim thinkers attempting to modernise Islam, and b) part of a concerted attempt to bind Muslim communities together and create a new political bloc after the fall of the Ottoman Empire or "last caliphate". Unfortunately, this project began and still remains exclusionary to many denominations within Islam – and thus has failed to unite a deeply diverse world.

4. **Islamism began as a social and political project before it was a violent movement. This is why any effort to reduce its enduring appeal in parts of the Muslim world must engage at the individual, social and political levels.** Violence and terrorism should be understood as the tactics or means to achieve a goal rather than the ultimate objective. Violence so far has served Islamists in sparking conflict, instability and unrest that undermine the legitimacy of existing regimes and rulers. They do this because the ultimate project remains one of state-building and social justice on their own terms.

History reveals the distinguishing characteristics among the regressive forces in this struggle. They are broadly speaking absolutist and uncompromising in their beliefs, and intolerant of competing or alternative points of view. This is based on the underlying conviction that it is the responsibility of Muslims to protect the "unadulterated truth". While many have used the term *fundamentalist* to describe this group, it is problematic because adherence to the fundamentals of Islamic belief is not its defining feature. Even the most liberal movements within Islam have insisted that their convictions are built on the fundamentals of the faith – the Quran and the Sunnah (traditions of the Prophet) as the first and original sources of Islam. [2] Others have described the regressive forces as extremist or radical, which is true in part – most of them do represent harmful extremes and many legitimise violence by abusing otherwise complex concepts related to jihad. Yet this group is not always, on every issue, radical or extremist in its interpretations of scripture although it is narrow-minded, literalist and systematically unequivocal. For generations, regressive forces within Islam – inspired by a spectrum of ideologies not always mutually exclusive – have interrupted momentum for social change, innovation and adaptation. This is discernible throughout every period of history since the foundations of Islamic political thought.

Consequently, the questions that have confronted Muslim thinkers since the 18th century are still hotly contested today: does Islam have its own unique system of government; should the historical "caliphate" be restored to unite Muslims under a single polity; what role should Islamic sharia law play in a modern state; what is the relationship of the state to God; and is Western liberal democracy compatible with Islam? The array of answers to these questions (and many more) range from a hardline extremist and absolutist response on the one hand to moderate, accommodating and liberal on the other. It is these debates and enduring questions that consistently divide the two forces of progressive and regressive within Islam today.

The battle over these questions has been waged most famously in the nations of the Middle East, but it is not limited to this region alone. The clash between progressive and regressive forces has occurred or become apparent in virtually every Muslim and non-Muslim country today, with far-reaching and real-life consequences long before 9/11.

### A Note on Our Retelling

This retold history of Islamism incorporates a summary of more than 50 published seminal and recent works by renowned and prolific historians of the Arab, Middle East and Islamic world. The conclusions, though not a direct representation of these scholars and their works, would not have been possible without the detailed collective research of these academics.

The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change summarises this past in the hope that future generations of historians on the region will have the pleasure of writing a revitalised history comprising more positive, flourishing and peaceful decades to come.

# Introduction

The West has long regarded the Islamist fight as one of security and defence. The aftermath of 9/11 set America and its allies on a war footing against Islam's violent extremists. Consequently, Western nations underestimated the ideological component of the fight and, despite the rhetoric at the time, the West did regard the so-called war on terror as one that would have a conventional, conclusive moment of victory or failure.

For decades – both before 9/11 and since – extremist groups have lived deep within the fabrics of societies, crossing borders in search of new conflicts and havens from which to recruit and inspire a revolt against the system. Islamist groups do this time and again, based generally on a belief in the obligation along theological and political lines to establish and enforce an absolute reading of Islamic sharia law as the underlying principle of public and state life. Islamists – whether militant or political, 20th or 21st century – have sought a restoration of Muslim "dignity" with a return to the so-called caliphate. For those who adopt violence, armed conflict and intimidation are regarded as legitimate means to overcoming perceived enemies of Islam who try to restrict the success of this project. Enemies include those who are seen to profit, benefit from or facilitate non-Muslim rule over "Muslim lands", and those who emulate the lifestyle of so-called "disbelievers". While some Islamist groups focus on struggles at the national or local level, many have an expansionist vision that continues to advocate a social and political model predating the advent of modern nation-states.

A combination of the Middle East and North Africa is home to the largest Muslim population in the world. Islam's seventh-century origins in the Arabian Peninsula, followed by Islamic conquests two centuries thereafter, meant that events that occurred in the modern-day Arab Middle East have had an impact that far exceeded both borders and time. The region became home to the greatest Muslim thinkers and, by the 19th century, two diametrically opposed trends preoccupied the intellectual elites as they attempted to instigate social and religious reform. Modernism advocated adapting Islam to Western ideals while revivalism proposed restoring the supremacy of Islam. In the end, neither trend would result in the re-establishment of a pan-Islamic caliphate. Instead Islam was challenged to express itself within the confines and framework of independent nations, focused instead on territory, ethnicity, language and shared ancient (but not exclusively religious) history. [3]

Barely a generation after many Muslim nations gained independence, the Islamic world entered a religious era that largely cancelled out the Islamic political thought and nationalist period that preceded it. The theoretical basis of the Islamist movement was devised from the late 1940s by the ideologues Mawlana Mawdudi in Pakistan, Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb in Egypt, and Ali Shariati and Ruhollah

Khomeini in Iran. But it did not emerge as a potent political force until after the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973.

The image of the Middle East and the Muslim world has since become marred by terrorism and sporadic violence. Centuries of vibrant political, economic, intellectual and cultural contributions have largely been overshadowed by the more recent decades of violence, political turmoil, authoritarianism and economic underdevelopment. [4] Although this history of Islamism recounts relatively modern developments within the Muslim world, its roots and how they manifest today is equally the story of a centuries-long struggle to define and redefine the boundaries of popular Islam and Muslim identity.

If we follow and re-examine the history of the past two centuries, then we see two fundamental realities that should frame our understanding of the dynamics in the Muslim world today:

1. **A liberal reformation of Islam has been ongoing for 200 years:** Cairo and Beirut had once been buzzing with the ideas and reforms of Arab luminaries (of all faiths and backgrounds), who could have carried forward a diverse political and cultural maturing. Instead, this inkling of a journey towards an Arab-Islamic enlightenment faltered. The *al-Nahda,* or the awakening, had produced an endless stream of poetry, literature, music and cinema now relegated to history and nostalgia. Secular and religious modernist thinkers, such as Muhammad Abduh, Jamal al-Din Al Afghani, Ali Abdel Raziq and Muhammad Rashid Rida (in his younger years), were exploring the benefits of a marriage between two seemingly opposing civilisations – the West and the modern Muslim world. It was during this period that the Muslim Brotherhood was established, as much a reaction to Islamic modernisers gaining influence as a response to European colonial rule.

2. **A fraught competition has arisen in the absence of a sustained, organised coalition:** By the 20th century, the Middle East and the Arab-Muslim world became hostages to two competing, but limiting, political ideologies and models. The first was Arab nationalism, secular and broadly speaking religiously tolerant albeit corrupt and incapable of modernisation because of vested interests and socialist economics. It survived for a time and gained capital because it offered the people a sense of social justice, seeming to correct years of exploitation by outside forces. Islamism, the second option, was comparatively speaking not corrupt, but in manipulating a religion into a political ideology, it had become by necessity exclusionary and intolerant based on the insistence that there is only one way to live and be governed – with anything else as heresy. Again, Islamists offered no compelling economic model for progress or deep reform, instead resorting to vague slogans such as "Islam is the solution" in response to all the failings of Arabs and Muslims in the modern world. Yet, when potently combined with a spirit of social justice, Islam carried a magnitude of meaning far greater than any government or institution wielding it could hope to contain.

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As regimes politicised and evoked the traditions of Islam for the sake of social solidarity and political legitimacy, they unleashed new ways for their opponents to move against them, sometimes with deadly consequences. The devastating 1967 defeat in the war against Israel stood as a stark reminder of the limits of Arab nationalism. The existence of the State of Israel had become the ultimate symbol for the ongoing legitimacy of nationalism, but it wasn't just the nationalists exploiting the wars against Israel to drum up popular support. Adherents to both nationalist militarism and Islamist militarism competed with one another over who was more fiercely anti-Israel. The result since has been an ideological deadlock.

### Defining the "Muslim World" Today

The Muslim world, in geographic terms, is of immense global significance because it has occupied the centre of the globe. It stretches from east to west and encompasses a set of 50 nations that straddles both the Global North and Global South. Muslim-majority nations sit at the crossroads of America, Europe and Russia on one side, and Africa, India and China on the other. [5] The global Muslim population is still expected to grow faster than the non-Muslim one, with the former making up a quarter of the world's total population by 2030. [6] Historically, Islam itself is also at a juncture: destined to play a role in world politics and to become the most prominent world religion during the 21st century. [7] The future of the Muslim world and its relationship with the West is therefore vital to how the West reasserts its alliances in the midst of this changing political, security and economic landscape.

To date, the West generally regards its interventions in the Muslim world as failures – either because the conflicts have been long and protracted or because the interventions have been met with staunch resistance. The defeatism behind this sense of failure is the belief that Western intervention has simply galvanised the extremists and served as a propaganda boon. It is fair to acknowledge that in both Iraq and Afghanistan, a cultural hostility towards America and its allies contributed greatly to the lack of any triumphant successes. But to argue that such hostility should preclude any future commitment to supporting forces who look to the West for help is to misunderstand the region entirely. It is an error to view the region through a prism of competing interests rather than to understand it as a stage of

competing ideologies. The history of the region and the interconnected Muslim world demonstrates this, and it is through this understanding that the dynamics at play today can be best considered and approached.

# Foundations of Islamic Political Thought: From a "Liberal" Age to Nationalism

The origins of the ideas and arguments upon which Islamist movements in the 21st century rely can be traced back to the late Middle Ages, long before Europe channelled any dominance over Muslim lands. Up to this point, Islamic empires enjoyed cultural dominance over much of the world. Muslims excelled in philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, architecture and literature. They studied other civilisations and world cultures, drawing on Greek and Roman classics and the Hellenistic world. [8] They also influenced political thought in medieval Europe through their translations of Greek philosophy that proved vital to European modernisation. But these generations of intellectuals were equally occupied with concepts of Islamic identity, state, law and society, with many of the ideas expressed during this early period becoming the foundations upon which later Muslim thinkers would construct their arguments. Indeed, these same ideas are still propagated by today's Islamists, whether consciously or not. The writings and ideas of the 13th- and 14th-century scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Khaldun are referenced by Islamists including al-Qaeda and ISIS. [9] What is always discarded when today's extremists appropriate the ideas of these seminal thinkers and embed them into their propaganda is the rich debate and dialogue that occurred among the early generations as well as the historical context of the times in which they shaped their beliefs.

## The Islamic World's Encounter with Europe

When faced with the reality of European imperialism and trading competition, Muslim political and religious elites of the 19th century set about proposing alternative models for the reconstruction of their societies – each one a variation on previous orientations between religion and state. The result was a series of experiments in political identity, from Islamic modernism to a secular nationalism, driven on one hand by resistance to European domination and, on the other, taking inspiration from it. Revival movements and types of nationalism in the Muslim world emerged and sometimes converged into ideologies that spanned the spectrum from puritanical, reformist, modernist, secular, nationalist and socialist all the way to absolute extremes, often referred to as Islamist today. [10]

By the beginning of the 20th century, European powers had completed their conquest of almost all the Muslim world, profoundly altering the dynamics of the Islamic societies. But this conquest also coincided with rapid changes in European societies themselves: Industrial Revolutions in Britain and later France and Germany introduced new bureaucracies for economic organisation and led to advancements in energy technologies; the American and French Revolutions brought into being notions of the modern

nation-state, citizenship and equality, and parliamentary institutions to facilitate mass political representation and civil society. These periods of transition and transformation formalised the separation of political and economic institutions from religious practice and belief, permeating societies around the world. In the Islamic world, there was more than one possible response.

## A Spectrum of Societies

Islamic political thought has evolved continuously. Two competing concepts that emerged between the medieval and pre-modern era remain relevant today. One was the so-called caliphate, which integrated state and community, politics and religion, into an inseparable whole. This remained dominant until the 13th century. [11] The second was the Sultanate or secular state, which ruled over the semi-autonomous religious institutions that upheld a Muslim religious way of life. This model emerged and shaped Muslim politics throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, after the fall of the Abbasid caliphate in 1258. In one image, the state was the all-encompassing expression of an Islamic society; in the other, it was formed of separate religious and state institutions.

The division of the Islamic world into sultanates from 1500 onwards saw the rise of three distinct and flourishing monarchic empires – the Turkish Ottomans, the Persian Safavids and the Mughals of India. Political theory was made to serve the vision of each empire rather than any universal caliphal culture. The relationship between Muslim communities and states was thus variable and often ambiguous. The legacy of pre-modern societies to the modern era, then, was not a defined structure of state and society but rather a wide spectrum. [12] Although each Islamic society was unique, they still resembled one another to a degree, interconnected via political and religious networks and shared values. A worldwide system of Muslim societies had come into being. [13]

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The so-called Abode of Islam, as it existed in the 18th century, was interlinked through a powerful shared notion of belonging to an enduring vast community formed at the final revelation of God through the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims were bound by common practices, behaviours, values and sources of tradition. Daily and ritual acts – from the fast of Ramadan to the pilgrimage to Mecca – helped preserve this deep sense of belonging, which was far more powerful for the masses than political allegiances or

shared interests alone. Islam proved an unshakeable uniting force despite an era of fragmentation and competition between its various empires.

Such ideas of Muslim solidarity and pan-Islamism never fully evaporated, later reigniting as a force for transpolitical unity that would challenge emergent secularising norms. To this day, there are those who are committed to preserving Islamic identity above all. This preservation at all costs is for most Islamists an unwavering and uncompromising position, which even for those have chosen more pragmatically to embrace democratic and pluralistic systems as the route to power, remains a feature of their ideology that precludes them from truly administering a fair and open society. This commitment to preserving Islamic consciousness within Muslim communities is often the gateway to mobilisation around the divisive rhetoric of *us versus them*, which labours the notion of Muslim hardship at the hands of non-Muslims – and is so often accompanied by victimhood narratives. It has also played its part in challenging the political legitimacy of governments (if they are not seen to be representing the interests of global Muslim communities) and served as the basis for politicising the faith in pursuit of power interests.

Throughout the recent history of the past 150 years, then, the revival of Islam as a political instrument has always been a tempting option for those seeking legitimacy and power.

## Islamic Revivalism and Modernity

In central Arabia, during the 18th century, a movement led by the religious revolutionary Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) began to call for Muslims to return to the original teachings as written in the Quran and contained in the Hadith (collected traditions of the Prophet). The movement's alliance with Muhammad ibn Saud would lead eventually to the formation of the Saudi state – fiercely absolutist in its adherence to the guidance of the sharia. But it was also during this century that, elsewhere in the Muslim world, the rapid advancement of Europe could no longer be ignored, and new alliances between reforming governments, foreign businessmen and local landowners already benefiting from trade were formed. New methods of military, administration and legal codes were modelled on those of Europe, as the West became the hallmark for modernisation.

By the 19th century, the multifarious world of Islam encountered the rise of Western culture almost in unison as Europe reached its pre-eminence. The Russians, Dutch and British had begun to establish themselves territorially, commercially and diplomatically in the East, driven by the need for raw materials to support their industrialising economies and feed their growing populations. For the first time in their history, Islamic empires neither had the power to resist nor the capacity to absorb this cultural threat. For this generation of Muslim thinkers, Europe was no longer simply a model to emulate, but an adversary with which to contend.

Between the 19th and 20th centuries, European influence had spread to all civilisations and provoked important changes and debates around the world. Across Islamic societies, European influence inflamed existing divides that had gradually developed between political and religious elites in previous centuries over such issues as political legitimacy and identity, state order and legislation. Consequently, there was more than one reaction to greater European penetration into Muslim lands, shaped and often driven by the stratification of new and traditional centres of power.

A new thinking emerged during this period of growing European domination. It revolved around attempts to explain the strength of Europe and to present a way of adopting European ideas and methods without diluting the place of Islam within society. In other words, its proponents sought to reconcile the Islamic faith with modern values such as rationality, equality and progress. Those who instigated and developed this alternative thinking were among the graduates of schools that had been created by reforming governments or foreign missionaries. Their dominant ideas included reforming Islamic law, the place of Islam in society, equal citizenship and, by the end of the 19th century, nationalism.

## Case Study: The Influence of the Islamic Modernists

Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) is the icon of this generation of modernists and his writings retained their relevance long after his death through the periodical "al-Manar" (literally "The Lighthouse").

If change was necessary to survive in the modern world, Muslims in the 19th century began to ask how Islam could be compatible. This was the starting place for those who came to be known as Islamic modernists and who believed their faith was not only compatible with rational thinking, progress and social cohesion (all foundations of modern civilisation) but in fact encouraged them. These ideas, presented most iconically by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897) and most clearly by Abduh, were to have a lasting impact on Muslim thinkers of later generations.

Abduh returned to the first sources – the Quran and the Sunnah – to prove that Islam was compatible with science and reason. He used this basis to argue that Islam and Islamic law should be interpreted in the context of the given time, and therefore be dynamic and adaptable to the modern era. The job of an Islamic scholar, according to Abduh, was to demonstrate how Islamic principles relate to the modern world.

Such a view of Islam became vital to the thinking of many educated Arab Muslims and those far beyond the Arab world. Abduh's writings could be interpreted and developed in more than one way, however, as fellow disciple Rashid Rida (1865–1935) proved. In defending the approach of returning to the first sources of Islam as the basis for navigating the modern world, Abduh's philosophy could equally be used to defend a more puritan interpretation that would later be famously represented by Wahhabism and modern Salafism. Instead of liberating Muslims to embrace modernity, Abduh's

> philosophy could just as easily be interpreted to constrain them. And this is the reason why many scholars have unfairly attributed Salafism to Abduh and his earliest followers.

In attempting to prove that Islam was a religion for all ages, Islamic modernists worked to convince those who were stuck in the old traditions that a willingness to learn from and adopt methods and principles originating outside Islamic traditions would allow Muslim societies to flourish and remain relevant. As Europe expanded its reach over Muslim lands and began to increase its control towards the second half of the 19th century, these debates became loaded, urgent and increasingly contested. Change in a European-dominated world had become inevitable but, as the century progressed, the impact on societies was stark. New cities were established around seaports and the pattern of urbanisation adapted to European trade. Populations were increasingly foreign and in some cases Europeans formed the majority of these new cities. [14] Schools, hospitals and churches were built to serve the cosmopolitan way of life. Indigenous Christian and Jewish merchants were more quickly able to adapt to engage in international trade and with the foreign presence. So, the challenge for Muslim modernists became one of reinterpreting Islam to show its compatibility with the modern era and the new way of life.

With fresh ideas and modernisation projects underway, a new type of educated elite was developing by the latter part of the 19th century, emerging from schools that were themselves of a new kind, especially in cities such as Cairo and Beirut. These were a combination of secular schools – established to educate the next generation of officials, doctors, engineers and military officers – and institutions founded by European and American missions. The traditional Islamic madrassa remained active, but a parallel system of modern education had developed. Graduates of these new schools would be as proficient in European languages as they were in Arabic. They were well-read in European literature and able to contribute to the growing industry of periodicals and newspapers. These became the channels through which knowledge of the new worlds of Europe and America came to the Arabs.

## Modernism Meets Nationalism

By the end of the first world war, the Ottoman Empire had altogether disappeared and from its ruins a new independent Turkish state had emerged. The Arab provinces were mandated to Britain and France and, except for parts of the Arabian Peninsula, all the Arabic-speaking world was under European control even if there was a façade of indigenous government. The replacement of the Ottoman caliphate with the new Republic of Turkey galvanised the debate around authority within Islamic political thought once more. The discourse on Islamic modernism that had been instigated by Abduh and his contemporaries the generation previously was now reshaped in the context of colonialism and the absence of an Islamic empire. Two strands of thought developed:

1. On the one hand, there were those who acknowledged the importance of Islam and the need to

preserve its roots while advocating for a separation of religion and public life in the spirit of modernity. Among Abduh's followers were those who attempted to argue that the model of the caliphate had never been divine, and that the Prophet had never set out to establish a state. These views were fiercely condemned by religious conservatives but, even so, the notion that a caliphate should never be restored was still widely accepted. [15] Christian Arab thinkers had, in past generations, expressed the need for secular norms to regulate Islamic society, but secular ideas were now carried forward by Egyptian Muslim thinkers such as Taha Husayn (1889–1973). The ideas of Islamic modernists converged with those of secular nationalist thinkers who would later hold more political significance.

2.  On the other hand, there were those who stood firm on the Islamic foundations of society and, in doing so, moved closer to a form of Islamic fundamentalism. This line of thinking still derived from Abduh and the Islamic modernists, but it emphasised the parts of their philosophy that called on returning to the foundations of Islam for answers to modern times – rather than reform or a reinterpretation. It evolved and took root as an expression of the restoration of Islam's moral supremacy in the face of foreign interference. Consequently, this strand also interlocked with growing expressions of nationalism and independence from colonial rule. During a period of increasing agitation against imperialism, it adopted a stance of political activism driven by restoration of individual and social morality according to the tenets of Islam. It is from this strand of thought that Islamism emerged. The notion that Islam alone could form the basis of a modern state was proven by the creation of Saudi Arabia.

The Treaty of Lausanne, signed in 1923, ended Turkey's right to exercise imperial interests over former Ottoman territories in exchange for its independence. In so doing, it effectively ended the caliphate and Turkey's right to claim spiritual authority over Muslim lands and holy sites. The decision to ratify the conditions of the treaty was deliberated by the Turkish parliament and eventually passed with a majority vote. Kemal Atatürk and Turkish republicans argued persuasively that the caliphate's time had come. Muslims living outside of Turkey protested the vote but with the last caliph exiled, there was no attempt by other Muslims to invite the caliph to their country.

The abolition of the caliphate crushed a generation of global Muslim political thought that had been tied to the Ottoman Empire's modernising project and reforms earlier in the century. With it the progressive ideas that had enjoyed increasing endorsement by the caliph-sultan – including the abolition of slavery and greater rights for women – lost a powerful advocate with religious-leadership credentials. However, in its place, Atatürk's secular reforms influenced a new Muslim political imagination and intellectual elite, not only in the Middle East of former Ottoman territories but also as far as Indonesia, Iran and Afghanistan. [16] Though Turkey had relinquished its right to imperial and transitional politics, the pull of a real or imagined shared Muslim condition endured.

**Case Study: The Reforms of King Amanullah Khan in Afghanistan and Civil War**

The collapse of the Ottoman caliphate had an impact beyond the territories it had formally occupied. In Afghanistan, and nearly a century before the United States and its allies embarked on the perilous task of transforming the country into a modern nation-state, Afghan King Amanullah Khan spearheaded a wide-ranging modernisation programme. Between 1919 and 1929, Amanullah Khan, inspired by Atatürk's reforms, introduced a series of economic, political and cultural Western-centric policies for modernity. He envisaged a state where Islam and material and immaterial aspects of Western society could coexist.

In 1923 a new constitution – the Basic Codes of the High State of Afghanistan – was drafted with the help of Turkish experts, underpinning the core principles of modernisation according to Amanullah Khan: freedom of religion, speech and press, and the emancipation of women. The new constitution fortified the concept of a constitutional monarchy for Afghanistan, where the credibility of the king and ruler was based not on Islam but on popular legitimacy. He codified Sharia law, imposing structural systems around it, while introducing a new secular courts system that transferred power from the religious establishment to a central government. Through this, he introduced secular education, encouraged Western dress in order to make less apparent the deep ethnic and tribal divisions within traditional Afghan society, and granted women legal protections against abuse, equal rights for inheritance and autonomy in marital matters.

But Amanullah Khan's rapid reforms and failure to co-opt the clergy proved to be his undoing. His reforms at home and his close dealings with secular Turkey and Iran – and by extension the Soviet Union – were deemed to be un-Islamic, and an intrusion into influences and interests that the religious elite had long protected. During a grand tour in Europe between 1927 and 1928, and while Amanullah was away from his country, opposition to his rule grew and an uprising in Nangarhar Province culminated in an organised revolt by the armed Saqqawists group. Their leader Habibullah Kalakani described himself as a "defender of Islam".

By 1929, after just ten years of the modernisation programme, Amanullah Khan was forced into exile in Italy and branded an infidel by his opponents. He died there in 1960. The rebellion in 1928 marked the beginning of the Afghan civil war during which a succession of leaders would each vie to lead Afghanistan in opposing directions.

Until then, the role of Islam coupled with Muslim identity in resisting or embracing European penetration into society would remain a contested subject. The end of the Ottoman Empire combined with the existence of a new Turkish nation-state fuelled ethnic nationalist and secular sentiments and, soon, the unifying principle in the former Ottoman territories had become one of nationhood. The political structure within which most Arabs had lived for 400 years had all but disintegrated. The Republic of Turkey became a symbol for those striving to cultivate a free and flourishing modern society

based on radical modernisation and Westernisation. But Kemalist policies were a radical expression of a secular nationalism. Atatürk did not concern himself with ideas of whether the West and the Muslim world were compatible or not. Instead he forcefully distanced Turkey from its Islamic past entirely, introducing not only secular domestic reforms but a cultural uncoupling from the wider Muslim world. For most other interwar-era nationalist ideologies building momentum in the Muslim world after the Ottoman collapse, the rhetoric of Islamic civilisation was still shot through with colonial resistance and a challenge to imposed Europeanisation.

The significance of Arabic as a common language and therefore history meant that in many nationalist movements, there was always an Islamic undertone. This tended to be implicit, though, both because the separation of religion and politics was widely regarded among the educated to be a requisite for a successful national project, and because in many Arab countries (including Egypt, Palestine and Syria), Muslims and Christians lived side by side. Hence, the nationalism of this period was generally a secularist one, underpinned by a belief that a bond could be formed that would embrace indigenous people of different faiths for the common interests of state and society. This nationalism placed importance on popular education to drive citizen participation in everyday collective life and viewed industrialisation as a means to rapid development, looking to Western Europe as an exemplar of modern civilisation.

Nationalism of this period was also an ideology that began to regard the emancipation of women as intrinsic to the success of the national project. In part, this was driven by a degree of pragmatic realism, which recognised that the full force of populations would need to be maximised for Arab people to be truly powerful in the face of European advancement. But it had also become a genuine movement for change with advocates from different backgrounds. The establishment of girls' schools by Europeans in the latter half of the 19th century had stimulated new ideas around women's roles in society, at least among the educated elite. The penetration of the European press, which depicted women in a new light, into traditional societies combined with increased travel encouraged new thinking, giving some women the courage to challenge traditions. Even within the Islamic reform movement, the emancipation of women found theoretical justification. Yet while more girls went to schools and universities, and women experienced a slight relaxation of societal rules, the changes over a decade were shallow and uneven. The legal status of women had not improved and while some actively participated in political movements – such as in Egypt and Palestine – there were few opportunities for women to emerge as professionals. In short, it was a movement still beholden to the idiosyncrasies of the emerging political elites.

Nevertheless, nationalist ideas spread across the Middle East, seeking to revive the Arabic language as a medium for modern expression and the basis for collective identity. This effort was supported by nationalist currents in popular culture, from literature, press and poetry to, increasingly, radio. The idea of a world remade based on self-determination had been actively encouraged in statements by US President Woodrow Wilson, and war had aroused a desire among Arab intellectuals and the political elite to reach a new political status. Many Arabs had volunteered to fight on the Western front and

expected recognition for their role in the allied victory. But the search for political status and self-determination clashed with British and French policies in the years following the war. The dashed hopes of Arabs following the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which divided the remainder of the Ottoman territories between allied victors as though spoils of war, left a bitter taste that would gradually feed into the shaping of a version of nationalism with a markedly anti-Western posture. For Europeans settling in Arab countries after the first world war, the idea that they were carrying out a civilising mission was apparent. There were those nationalists (usually educated in the new foreign institutions and connected to landowning classes) who tolerated this but who worked within the system to achieve greater self-government than had previously existed under British or French mandatory control. And there were those who found a new nationalist reawakening and claimed to speak for their nation.

### Resistance to Change

Both the Islamic modernists and the secular nationalist thinkers faced stiff competition in the market of ideas, and they suffered from their own elitism. Their spokespeople were often men of standing and wealth, or those who had raised themselves to the higher classes by their own efforts, but they were increasingly unrelatable to the average man on the street. Consequently, this also meant that expressions of nationalism at this time were not built on ideas of victimhood or social justice – and in many ways they felt out of touch with the realities faced by the masses. Few thinkers were occupied with questions of social policy once independence was achieved, so intent were they on their yearning for autonomy as a symbol of equality alongside Europe. The result was a nationalism that was strangely ambivalent towards its occupiers. The desire to reshape the relationship with Europe rather than sever it was no contender to the more activist movements already in motion.

> The desire to reshape the relationship with Europe rather than sever it was no contender to the more activist movements already in motion.

By the 1930s, many societies were experiencing deep divides and changes that would affect the nature of politics and traction of new political visions. [17] There was both a cognitive and real stratification. Hybrid systems formed, shaped by a conflict of minds over the prominence of Islam in the conception of national projects. While a large part of the educated elite no longer lived according to the Islamic law or

the sharia, and legal systems were developing based on European legal codes instead, the authority of the sharia remained important with regards to all personal and family matters.

Many of those who did still adhere to an Islamic way of life tended to interpret it in a new way. The position of the religious authority had changed in society. Religious leaders no longer held important roles in government. Instead leaders of new political parties were the spokespeople for the masses. The education offered by the madrassas was no longer so attractive to the young and ambitious – a religious education did not advance careers to government service anymore and it did not appear to provide the matrix for the understanding of and preparation for modern life. [18] Wealthy families in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon were instead choosing to send their children to secondary schools, including the proliferating international or foreign schools (France, England, US) where they were able to acquire European languages. Even in the slower-to-adapt Morocco, French schools were proving more and more popular among local people. Islam, and the ways to teach and interpret it, was changing and broadening beyond that which was taught at the great religious centres of excellence, namely Al-Azhar University and Zaytouna College. The reformist thinking of Abduh had gained some notoriety and interest among young graduates. For some still embedded in the old system of learning, the old content appeared stale and uninspiring.

> **Case Study: A Dual Education System and Divided Society**
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> A modern education system had been established to support the earlier reforms of governments in their rapid modernisation plans. New schools were designed in markedly different ways to the existing religious system of education, and Muslim societies swiftly witnessed the creation of an education that was modelled on European culture and values and which rivalled the traditional religious one without entirely supplanting it. A division into two national systems emerged – one of the traditional religious and the other of the modern secular. Each system, as the newer one developed, served a different class of citizen and performed quite a different function. Traditional schools, based on Islamic teaching methods, continued to provide a rudimentary education for the masses including reading, writing and arithmetic while modern state schools offered a secular, European-style education for the existing and aspiring elite.
>
> This clear split created a deeply fractured culture that, in some Muslim societies, persists to this day. The parallel existence of such contrasting forms of education perpetuated differences between social classes by creating an intellectual elite or "cultured aristocracy" that typically monopolised government positions and high-income professions. Leading Egyptian novelist Ahmed Amin, in his collection of personal essays called Hayati (My Life), has explained what he called the "Missing Links" or al-Halaqat al Mafqudah. In his work, Amin yearned for a group of thinkers truly at home in both worlds who could provide a bridge between the two cultures. Those versed in Islam, he explained, know of the holy texts and tradition with detail and precision but remain detached from the realities of the day while, by contrast, the modern system produces graduates who are familiar

with physics, chemistry and Western philosophical thought but lack Arabic fluency and cannot transmit their learning.

Soon this cultural gap between these dual systems of education translated into economic and social inequality, and graduates of traditional institutions had a competitive disadvantage in modern aspects of society. The new elite became aptly referred to as "the (French) knowers". Those who opposed their reforms, such as the religious clergy, were sidelined. But those who were sidelined would not necessarily accept this quietly.

By the 1940s the modernist effort to reformulate Islam in ways that would make it a viable response to the demands of modern life remained the most widespread form among the educated elite, including those who had led nationalist movements and now dominated new independent governments. Some of the leading nationalist writers began to more explicitly write on Islam with the purpose of articulating an Islam that was rational, humane, democratic and devoted to economic progress while recognising the competing narratives emerging. Schisms that had formed in societies during the colonial era were still apparent and especially pronounced between the urban and wealthier and poorer communities who lived in the countryside. A traditional way of life outside the major cities was therefore perpetuated largely as a result of the vast differences in income, literacy, and access to birth control and other modern commodities. This era became one of deep inequality and social injustice. It was masked by the flamboyant expressions, literature, art and music of national unity but, beneath the surface, grievances were brewing.

The search for a more just society created the impetus for both popular nationalism and popular Islamism.

# Popular Islamism: Rise of the First Organised Movements

Among popular Islam, an activist political version had been taking root. Modern Islamist ideology did not materialise in a vacuum, therefore; it emerged from within the tradition it borrowed and exaggerated certain elements while downplaying others. [19] The first and earliest formal Islamist onslaught was against nationalism more so than colonialism, and its aim was to replace one vision of the world community with another. By the 1930s and prior to 1970, nationalist ideology preoccupied many Islamic countries. These ideologies had been constructed by local elites who fought to overcome European colonisation and lead their countries to independence in the aftermath of the second world war and parallel British decline. Nationalist sentiments before and after independence had fragmented the historic "land of Islam" into many communities with varying priorities while pushing aside the former religious establishment in pursuit of secular missions. The nationalists had usurped the modern tools of communication – newspapers, radio and later television – and these became the vehicle through which they spread new ideals of freedom and equality, with traces of European-style enlightenment. As time passed, the nationalists' hold over the press and media became not just an instrument for independence and freedom but a propaganda tool from which to assert power and legitimacy – and often censor unwanted rivals.

Modern nation-states had therefore profoundly affected the organisation, practice and conception of Islam. As both private belief and social identity, Islam was becoming disassociated from the communal and political institutions in which it had once been embedded. The secularisation of Muslim states reinforced the commitments of religious institutions and organisations to protect a degree of piety among their communities. They did so either as independent local congregations, or together as part of larger movements. These associations multiplied in the interwar years and again in the post-independence era. They committed to inculcate the correct interpretation and practice of Islam, providing community welfare (including sponsoring schools, clinics and cooperatives) and fostering solidarity among Muslims. They gained strong appeal among students, intellectuals, technicians and professionals. [20]

The theorists and spiritual leaders that would pioneer this movement and take it onto the potent political mobilising force it is today were of one generation in particular. Born in the early 20th century, they had lived their teenage years through the collapse of the Ottoman caliphate and the subsequent struggle between Islamic modernists and traditionalists to redefine its future in the new world. Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949) and Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) were instrumental to the growth of the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Mawlana Mawdudi (1903-1979) founded the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan, and Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989) was the leader behind the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran.

They were born a few years apart and spanned Islamic societies – Egypt to India/Pakistan and Iran – but their ideas as they developed them would have an enduring impact on Muslim political expression.

### The Muslim Brotherhood – Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb

The Society of the Muslim Brothers, founded in 1928 by school teacher Hassan al-Banna, began as a movement for the reform of personal and social morality based on a belief that Muslim societies were in decline because influence from the West had introduced immorality and imperial domination. The society formed to reclaim Muslim identity and revive Islam's political dimension. In the eyes of the brothers, the so-called land of Islam had become fragmented and the unity of the faithful lost as the Ottoman caliphate had collapsed. Faced with the chorus of nationalists who were demanding independence, a British departure and a democratic constitution at the time, the brothers coined an alternative slogan that is still active in the Islamist movement today: "The Quran is our Constitution." For the Muslim Brotherhood, Islam was a complete and total system. The Quran contained the moral principles on which to base a universal social order, not European manmade rules. A return to an Islamic state was the solution to all the problems facing Muslims in the modern era. Within a few years, the Muslim Brotherhood had grown into a mass movement that attracted urban, lower-middle-class men who had only recently become literate and were inspired by a religious political vision. They politicised this religious zeal and challenged the Islamic modernists who were calling for a more flexible interpretation of Islam.

> The Muslim Brotherhood called for the preservation of the separation of the sexes, restriction of education to religious learning, and the basis of economic growth and reform to be only the Quran.

The solution according to the principles of founding father al-Banna was to return to Islam and to follow its guidance in everyday life. Muslim Brotherhood propaganda was clear that the end goal was to spearhead the establishment of an Islamic state that would then confront the enemies of Islam by force. Their vision therefore extended to the whole Muslim world while also advancing the notion of contemporary jihad, albeit placing it as secondary to preaching. The Muslim Brotherhood called for the preservation of the separation of the sexes, restriction of education to religious learning, and the basis of

economic growth and reform to be only the Quran. They also demanded that legitimate political leaders be only those who acted according to the sharia and that foreign rule was a direct threat to the authentic practice of Islam. They placed great emphasis on social justice, and wealth and class divisions in society. They thrived among the politically marginalised and discontented but they also courted the politically powerful until they were banned and forced to operate underground.

Two further ideological contributions were brought forward by Sayyid Qutb, the Muslim Brotherhood's chief ideologue in the 1950s through to the 1960s, following al-Banna's death, transforming the Islamist movement to the present day. First, his argument that Muslims were stuck in a state of harmful ignorance or *jahiliyyah*, and that Muslims should rise up to break the curse just as the Prophet had done in Arabia against the pagans. Second, the idea that those Muslims who do not rise up automatically forfeit their right to be Muslims and can therefore be killed lawfully. This concept is known as *takfir* and is the theological basis on which ISIS and al-Qaeda "legitimately" target Muslim worshippers in mosques and can also murder Islamic scholars who condemn their practices. Qutb emerged as a leading ideologue and martyr for the movement, and his death activated a radical violent offshoot that inspired the jihadists of the late 20th century.

## Jamaat-e-Islami – Mawlana Mawdudi

Mawdudi's first publication Jihad *in Islam* was released in Urdu in the late 1920s around the same time Hassan al-Banna created the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The context in which both men mobilised was profoundly similar despite significant differences in the political, cultural and social experiences between the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East. As with early Arab nationalists, their Pakistani counterparts had an equally ambiguous relationship with Islam. They yearned for a "Muslim state" on the Indian subcontinent but not an "Islamic state". This mirrored the ambiguity of the basis of nationhood across the Middle East. Even Israel, which came into existence a year after the creation of Pakistan in 1947, was explained by secular Zionists as "a state for the Jews" not a "Jewish state". [21] The goal of Pakistani nationalists therefore, just as in the Middle Eastern societies of the time, was to unite citizens of a modern nation based on a model familiar to them through European and British influence.

Through Mawdudi, Islam became an ideology for political struggle. Unlike the nationalists, he agitated for an Islamic state spanning all of India. For him, all nationalism was impiety especially because modern states were built on the values of Europe. But he also despised the religious establishment and accused them of having conspired with the British since the fall of Muslim-held Delhi in 1857. He favoured an "Islamisation from above" through the creation of a state that would be administered and managed according to the sharia and in the name of Allah. He insisted that politics and Islam were inseparable and that once a true Islamic state emerged, all Muslims' struggles would end. He also argued that the five

pillars of Islam – declaration of faith or the *shahada*, prayer or *salat*, fasting or *sawm*, pilgrimage or the *hajj* and charity or *zakat* – were in fact phases of training and preparation for jihad.

He established a party called Jamaat-e-Islami in 1941, which he saw as the vanguard of the Islamic revolution. Compared to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood between 1930 and 1950 and other Islamic parties at the time, though, Jamaat-e-Islami failed to attract a large popular following and its impact on elections was consistently weak. It drew support from the educated middle-classes but failed to reach the poorer in society where Urdu was not understood. It did prove influential, however, as the then-largest Islamic organisation in Asia and it served as an inspiration for the sixth President of Pakistan, General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, when he introduced his state-sponsored Islamisation projects in the 1970s. Mawdudi also influenced and inspired the ideas of Qutb.

### Khomeinism – Ruhollah Khomeini

As in Pakistan, the significance of the Islamist movement in Iran would only be fully realised in the 1970s long after the Islamists began their work. As with Mawdudi, Khomeini preferred a top-down Islamisation approach.

Throughout the creation of the modern Iranian state, which later inspired Khomeini's world view, fallout between modernisers and the politically powerful religious establishment was a dominant feature. As in the Arabic-speaking Middle East, the 19th and 20th centuries had been a struggle between modernism and traditionalism. The modernisation of the Ottoman Empire and Egypt in the 19th century had inspired Iranians to rethink the political structure of their country. Liberal and revolutionary newspapers, from the Russian-held Caucasus region, circulated in Iran and helped to promote a new ecosystem of opinion that mirrored trends in the wider Muslim world. Many Muslim intellectuals who were influential in Iran argued that reform was compatible with Islam. Others, such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, emphasised the political aspects of Islam as an anti-imperialist doctrine that could help revive national pride and mobilise Muslims to resist Westernisation. Still, ultimately, they agreed on the need to modernise.

> Iran had become a magnet for foreign interference and a pawn for competing Western interests.

Throughout the 20th century, Iran struggled with internal conflict between the religious establishment and the state, Russian and British intervention, and a series of separatist revolts on ethnic and tribal lines. Eventually power was consolidated by Reza Khan, the founder of the Pahlavi regime that lasted between 1925 and 1979. Under the Pahlavi regime, Iran was set on a similar course to Turkey in pursuing economic modernisation and cultural Westernisation. After the second world war, Iran passed through a tumultuous period of open political struggle between its various would-be foreign protectors; Britain and Russia both sought to maintain supply routes through Iran and control over Iranian oil, while by the late 1940s the United States recognised Iran as a key Middle Eastern barrier against Soviet expansion and so the cold war emerged. Iran had become a magnet for foreign interference and a pawn for competing Western interests. Nothing demonstrated this more clearly than when Iran struggled to win control of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, instead facing an imposed military coup to reestablish a new regime more favourable to American and British interests. This regime introduced major reforms to advance the modernising and nationalising project that had already begun but it soon became brutish and authoritarian as the new shah sought to consolidate his power against mounting opposition to the inequality and corruption within the country. Beneath the veneer of modernisation and wealth, the shah was deeply unpopular and Iranian society beyond the upper classes impoverished.

It was in this context that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini became prolific as an expert on the sharia and earned his scholarly and spiritual credentials as a *marja* or "source of emulation". He agitated against the immoral, un-Islamic direction taken by the shah's regime, despising its reliance on the West. As a young scholar, he wrote in a mosque's visitor book that the Muslim world had abandoned God and it was selfishness that was the cause of its stagnation. [22] He attended events and pan-Islamic gatherings to discuss the suffering of Palestinians, Algerians and colonised Muslims before he was exiled from Iran in 1963.

In Khomeini's writings from as early as 1941, he resuscitated the old Shia tradition of *velayat-e-faqih* or clerical authority and expanded it to include theocratic political rule by Islamic jurists. Though not widely known until the late 1970s, the principle of *velayat-e-faqih* when reapplied in the modern political context, according to Khomeini, was to hand over unquestioned authority to an imam. He would later coin a new title – "Supreme Leader" – and adopt it for himself after the success of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Elections for presidents and MPs were fine, he stated, but in the spirit of *velayat-e-faqih* all Iranians and elected officials should submit to the imam who ruled as semi-divine. By allowing elections and yet reviving the Shia tradition of authority, Khomeini married together seventh-century Islam with 20th-century political representation. Combined with his revolutionary fervour and emphasis on social justice, Khomeini had a dramatic impact on Islamist movements globally after the revolution. He had proved it was possible to overthrow one of the most powerful secular regimes in the Middle East, and he did so with nothing more than sermons and a clandestine operation of letters and writings while in exile for 15 years. He believed, and so did many others, that his revolution would transform the Islamic

world. In truth, it dramatically altered the course of Islamic political thought but, in doing so, regressive forces were galvanised.

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**Case Study: Modernists on the Intellectual Retreat** [23]

For the Arab populations of the Middle East and North Africa, the second world war had created new economic constraints. With this growing hardship, a greater emphasis on religion and Islamic norms and values re-emerged. So much so that leading modernist thinkers and newly formed, otherwise secular and liberal political parties began to adopt Islamic symbolism and rhetoric to re-engage mass audiences. It was a sharp departure for modernist thinkers who had long promoted European culture and disparaged traditional practices. Secular modernist intellectuals including Taha Husayn, Abbas al-Aqqad and Muhammad Haykal began to romanticise an Islamic golden era, their writings reinforcing the world view of religiously inspired social movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Surrendering his secular stance, Husayn published an analysis and interpretation of the Prophet Muhammad's life. Similarly, Haykal prepared a series of books relating to the prophet and the first caliphs where he documented plots against Islam by Western colonisers and Christians. Al-Aqqad, a member of a secular political party who had written a scathing analysis of Nazism as a threat to freedom and modernity during the second world war, later published his most famous volumes called "*al-Abqariyyat*" or "geniuses", which highlighted the glory of early Islam as well as charismatic leaders in Islamic history.

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The belief held by such movements that the laws of Islam and religious doctrine could provide the foundations for society in the modern world was substantiated by the creation of the Saudi state in the early 20th century. Attempts by Ibn Saud and the Wahhabis to preserve the centrality of the sharia against tribal and local cultural influences on the one hand and innovations from the West on the other, had a more profound effect in later years once the kingdom gained a more prominent position in the world following the discovery of oil. But as early as the 1930s, its mere existence resonated beyond its borders as the site of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and an example of a modern state that resisted the urge to modernise. Elsewhere, many of these movements and the thinkers behind them gained notoriety and support for being more aggressively nationalist than the movements of the European-educated elite, and because they appealed more openly to the Islamic sentiments of the masses.

But none of these movements gave much thought to the intricate social agenda for an Islamic society in the modern world. Almost all depicted Islam as the instrument for social justice but in no way did they present a coherent vision for social welfare and economic advancement. Mawdudi was explicitly against both capitalism and socialism as a social or economic model. The Muslim Brothers talked of charity, the state and education but rarely did they discuss the questions of social mobility and regulation of economic life that might have made them more serious political contenders. And the eventual success of

Khomeini's revolution was in large part due to his luck in uniting the political left with the revolutionary clergy against the shah's regime.

## Ideological Competition in the Postcolonial Period

During this period, secularists, socialists and Islamists vied for political legitimacy in a chaotic but relatively open political atmosphere. [24] The decades before and after independence from colonial powers were a time when activists, young politicians and intellectuals obsessed over the ideas of social justice and inequality. An intellectual legacy of the Islamic modernists – who had urged Muslims to learn from the West – was that ideological promiscuity and appropriation could lead to advancement. The competing ideologies of secular Arab nationalism and Islamism – both of which would evolve into unyielding visions – were at this time still in great flux, with notable overlap both in terms of the ideas they espoused and the members they attracted.

Qutb's journey into Islamism is reflective of the fluidity of ideologies in the Arab and Islamic world during this period. As the region changed dramatically with increased Western influence, reactions occurred in real time and, so, the coherence of and motivating factors behind ideas and positions were often a result of constantly evolving convictions. The distinction between secular nationalism and Islamic revivalism, for example, or religious nationalism and secular nationalism, was not clearly demarcated in terms of world views or visions, and many thinkers and intellectuals engaged with the full spectrum of ideas before they settled on one. Qutb's early years were spent reciting the Quran and later writing poetry, novels and short stories about problems of love and marriage. He was employed by the Egyptian Ministry of Education and mentored by secular nationalists including Taha Husayn. He'd joined the oppositional nationalist Wafd party, becoming a prominent critic of the Egyptian monarchy. His criticism began to take on an Islamic-oriented activism and so he was sent by the ministry on a study mission to the US in an attempt to induce him to abandon his scepticism towards the West. Famously, the trip there in fact entrenched his hostility to the West and alienated him from his old mentors. His perception of the Muslim Brothers as defenders of Islam was strengthened further when, on his return to Egypt, a British official told him that the organisation represented the only barrier to the achievement of "Western civilisation" in the Middle East. [25]

> Islamists and Arabists clashed so violently not because they were radically different but rather because they were too similar to coexist.

Similarly, the Islamists' appropriation of left-leaning political thinkers and figures was a peculiar but persistent feature of their movements as they emerged and articulated visions for Islamic society. Though each argued for the absolute self-sufficiency of Islam as a political model, Mawdudi was inspired by Lenin's vanguardism, al-Banna and later Qutb were in part mobilised by the ideas of Marx and Gramsci and even referenced Mussolini as inspiration, and Khomeini rallied support from Iranian Marxist intellectuals in order to capitalise on their popularity among the activist student body. The borrowing of leftist political thought was instrumental to Islamists succeeding in their mission to transform a religious faith into a political ideology, and the approach reflects the time in which these movements emerged. Specifically, a period of growing Soviet influence, socialist and communist parties on the rise in Western Europe, the Communist Party's coming to power in China, and the translation and articulation of Marxist ideas into Arabic.

Gamal Nasser, who became the pioneer of the most potent and popular form of pan-Arabism, was both a staunch nationalist and, in effect, an Islamist. He had become a member of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1947 and, though he quickly grew frustrated by them, he continued to collaborate with its leadership, viewing the organisation as a powerful social and political force. During his time in the military, he eventually concluded that the British-backed monarchy needed to be overthrown and he assembled a group of like-minded young military men, officially named the Free Officers. In 1952, the Free Officers ousted the sitting monarch and took control of Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood, including Qutb, approved of Nasser's coup and the organisations consulted frequently about the future of Egypt for a short period. In time, though, and soon after the coup, the Islamists became disillusioned with the Nasserist project while Nasser began to see the Islamists as hungry for power at his expense. From 1954, Nasser violently suppressed the Islamist movement and, by 1966, Qutb had been imprisoned, freed, rearrested for plotting to overthrow the state and finally executed. Despite this eventual clash, Nasser's allegiance had once openly been given to the brotherhood's founder al-Banna, and he had trained the society's youth to use firearms while himself joining the secret paramilitary wing as a young man. [26] Likewise, Qutb had been among the first to lend legitimacy to Nasser's coup by calling it a "revolution" while publicly endorsing his Free Officers. [27]

This ideational fluidity marked the postcolonial period. Consequently, far from being diametrically opposed, the movements of Islamism and (Arab) nationalism that matured during and after the interwar years had critical commonalities: both dedicated themselves to anticolonialism and national liberation; they each mobilised to resist alien influences of Westernisation; and they deployed culture – religion, language and tradition (each to varying degrees) – as an instrument for awakening and organising the masses. Sharing a cultural and social lineage, the two ideologies acknowledged the importance of identity, social justice and the feeling of cultural renewal. They shared a belief that the cleansing of the political elite was needed because they were either corrupt or traitors. And they equally identified themselves as the vanguard and protector of the people.

Though they became opposing forces, with Arab nationalism spearheaded by the military and the Islamists led mainly by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, their interactions with each other shaped postcolonial Middle Eastern politics, leaving indelible scars on sociopolitical life to this day. The competition between the two ideologies was initially focused in Egypt but the confrontation spread to adjacent countries, undermining their own postcolonial nation-building projects. The rift between Islamists and nationalists that began in the 19th century deepened throughout the course of the postcolonial era – since creating the political and social fractures and fault lines observable during the Arab uprisings of 2011. It therefore remains a part of political life in the Arab nations, Middle East and wider Muslim world, albeit with varying dynamics and legacies to confront. The focus of the struggle – though far from inevitable as the 19th-century debates have proved – is the state and its power and position as custodian of the public sphere. [28] Therefore, one movement and its history cannot be fully understood without having understood the other's.

Islamists and Arabists clashed so violently not because they were radically different but rather because they were too similar to coexist. In both ideologies, the messages of resetting history and rescuing their countries from constraints and the humiliation of previous years were at their core. And yet both sought to gain social and moral capital from the same Islamic and Arab heritage, and both put a high premium on identity and modernity. [29]

# Popular Nationalism and the Rise of Nasserism

Up until 1939, there had been more than one type of modern nationalism shaping political thought. There were those who advocated for a religious nationalism, those who espoused a territorial nationalism and others who mobilised behind an ethnic or linguistic nationalism. For better or worse, the latter became the dominant political idea in the Middle East, absorbing or superseding all others. It was this ethnic- and linguistic-based nationalism that emerged most popularly after the second world war. An Islamic aspect would always remain important in popular nationalism in order to extend its appeal to the mass audience, but the main elements distinguishing it from previous nationalisms were inspired by a consciousness of the so-called Third World, Arab unity and socialism.

There were several attempts to create movements that could become political forces with the power to mobilise mass support and which would combine all the important elements for popular nationalism. Two were of particular significance by the 1950s to 1960s: one was the Ba'ath (Resurrection) Party that emerged in Syria in the 1940s, playing an important role in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq; and the other was the Egyptian regime that gradually acquired a characteristic ideology (later) coined Nasserism after the personality of the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. The first was an ideology that became a political force and the latter was a political force that became an ideology. Under both ideologies, the Arab officer classes and military groups became the political forces associated with popular nationalism – both as a departure from the traditional ruling class that was now perceived to be corrupt and in the absence of any other united revolutionary group. Thus, the military was now seen positively as the saviour class.

Both Nasserism and Ba'athism resonated beyond their homes, but the former in particular had the ability to mobilise mass opinion. While both used the language of Islam to appeal to the masses, in general they stood for a reformist Islam that endorsed secularising change. Religious institutions fell strictly under the oversight and control of government to ensure the right version of Islam was taught and promoted. However, Islam came second or third after Arab nationalism and unity. While Arab unity as an idea had existed previously, the Nasser regime began to openly see Egypt as the leader of an Arab world. Egypt's leadership would be in service of a social revolution to address the lack of development caused by exploitation while reviving an Arab consciousness. It included supporting state control of production, and the redistribution of income to correct inequalities and reverse corruption of the landowning and colonial-era elite. The social-reform programme was framed around an Arab socialism that was halfway between Marxism and capitalism: a system where the whole of society would rally around a government that would pursue the interests of all. Social democracy was seen as a precondition of any political democracy, and this meant absolute public ownership of banks, communications and all public services, as well as foreign trade.

In neighbouring Arab countries, Nasserism was deeply popular. His personality and the early successes of his assertive regime – the political victories of the 1956 Suez Crisis and Aswan High Dam project combined with popular measures of social reform – promised hope of a different condition for Muslim and Arab societies at a time of Europe in decline coupled with the possibility of Middle Eastern states being truly independent. Nasser's commitment to defending Palestinian interests also demonstrated strong and principled leadership on the most mobilising issue of the time for Arabs and Muslims alike. Nasserism thus became a potent symbol of unity and revolution, and it manifested in political parties and movements across the region in Lebanon, Syria and among Palestinian refugees.

## Case Study: The Palestinian Cause – A Boon to Nationalists and Islamists Alike

The loss of Palestine was a disaster for Arab nationalists and Islamists alike. The creation of the State of Israel, defeat of Arab armies and expulsion of the Palestinian population had a profound effect on the development of Arab-nationalist thought. The lack of unity against Zionism among the Arab people was identified as a key factor in explaining the loss of Palestine in 1948. And while it was this failure to unite that also explained the loss among the Islamists, they agitated for Muslim unity instead of Arab unity, perceiving the conflict as primarily religious.

When the 1948 defeat prompted a pan-Arab and pan-Islamic search for regionwide unity as an answer to the problem of Palestinian refugees and statehood, there was a distinct absence of leadership. Immediately after (but years before Nasser's eventual coup), the Egyptians under King Farouk – part of the Khedival monarchy – were shattered from the defeat of the Arab-Israeli war and in no place to lead a mobilising effort. The kings of Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia lacked the will and global legitimacy to step up and lead an Arab or Muslim world – albeit imagined at this point. Jordan hosted several Muslim congresses after 1948 and the specific location of the gatherings in Jerusalem, then under its control, reflected an Islamic symbolism. They attracted official and unofficial participation, including from the Muslim Brotherhood-linked Qutb as well as Shia clerics, but ultimately gained little traction. The Arab leadership vacuum was only filled when Nasser's new government in Cairo was formed. Anwar Sadat, then the minister of state and future president of Egypt, travelled to Jerusalem in 1955 to make official Egypt's commitment to the Palestinian cause. The Saudi-Egyptian relationship was tightened and Pakistan, which had attempted to revive a Muslim unity in the absence of Arab leadership shortly before, would have liked the establishment of a three-country Islamic bloc. This was duly considered but did not match Nasser's pan-Arab interests.

The place of Muslim identity in world politics at this point was so varied and interchangeable that it was no longer possible to maintain narratives of pan-Islamism among Muslim policymakers as had previously been possible in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Each postcolonial nation-state had its own version of the role of Muslim identity in nationalist ideology but most dominant was the sense that national loyalties and interests superseded collective religious action. Consequently, the period

from the 1950s to the 1970s witnessed very few successes in pan-Islamic mobilisation even on issues such as Palestine, which still had the power to conjure feelings of Muslim suffering. This was the hallmark of the success of Arab nationalism – it had drowned out the discourse on Muslim identity. This did not mean, however, that the discourse was not happening beneath the surface. Feelings of Muslim hardship were far from dormant during this period of Arab-nationalist ascendency. Instead, Islamist ideologues published some of their sharpest and most revolutionary propaganda at this time as they turned to the Palestinian cause, as well as to the Kashmir conflict that had begun in 1947, to evoke a feeling of universal Muslim humiliation and to highlight the failures of postcolonial nation-states to achieve decisive victory, dignity and prosperity for their societies.

## Cold War Rivalry and Its Effects on the Muslim World

Virtually the whole region was independent by 1962, and so the task for nationalists became one of sustaining and protecting this newfound autonomy. The importance of the Afro-Asia bloc in the United Nations, of which President Nasser was leader, was a consequence of this feeling because it served to create a zone that would prevent the great powers imposing their will on countries of the region. There also emerged a real sense of freedom from reliance on the West as, following the colonial-modernisation projects of the previous 50 years, Eastern nations had caught up with Western Europe, European Russia and North America. For the first time in modern history, it was possible for Eastern nations to break from their relationship with the West, if they wished, and to continue on a path towards modernisation. This new choice meant that for a few politicians, acceptance of the West became deliberate and more impassioned and articulate in order to defend their decisions. But for many other politicians, preserving a relationship with the West had become a hangover of imperial control, and so it was passionately rejected.

Despite this, the regimes that assumed power in postcolonial nation-states could be divided geopolitically along lines roughly corresponding to the two major power blocs: communists and the West. On the one side were those socialist countries aligned to Moscow, including Nasser's Egypt, Ba'athist Syria and Iraq, Muammar Qaddafi's Libya, Algeria under Ahmed Ben Bella and Houari Boumedienne, Southern Yemen and Sukarno's Indonesia. The leaders of these nations placed restrictions on traditional Islamic institutions with a view to instrumentalising them to deepen the social capital of the regimes. On the other side were the nations allied to the West, ranging from those with a pronounced secular bias such as Turkey and, to a lesser extent, Tunisia under Habib Bourguiba to those preserving Islam as the basis of their regime's legitimacy, exemplified by Saudi Arabia.

**Case Study: The Saur Revolution and Afghanistan's Soviet Alignment**

The Soviets had long courted Afghan's leadership, with varying success. After decades of civil war and liberal and democratic experiments, Afghanistan's political parties on both left and right were perhaps more advanced than those of many other Muslim nations. The Soviets had exploited this lively party system and closely supported the communist-leaning People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Through the 1970s, the party coordinated effectively to orchestrate a bloody military coup in 1978. The coup became known as the Saur Revolution and on 1 May, Nur Mohammad Taraki became leader of the newly reconstituted Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

Once in power, the PDPA implemented a Marxist-Leninist agenda, and imposed "state atheism", removing religious freedoms and enforcing a strictly secular way of life. Men were forced to shave their beards, traditionally viewed as symbols of piety; women were prevented from wearing the headscarf or *chardor*. Mosques were shut down or repurposed. And the PDPA also introduced greater privileges for women, equal access to education and the abolition of forced marriage. A new generation of Afghans, after Amanullah Khan's modernising programme of the 20th century, witnessed a new form of aggressive Western-centred reforms, this time inspired by socialist and communist practices.

The regime under the PDPA was brutal and broadly unpopular. It imprisoned, tortured and killed thousands of members of the religious clergy, and open revolt occurred in the rural areas of the country. Many of the Afghan army defected in support of the anti-government revolts. By December 1978, the Soviet Union and the PDPA regime signed an agreement that allowed the Soviets to provide full military support in Afghanistan when needed. Islam became the only unifying force capable of bringing together opposition against the regime that crossed all tribal and ethnic lines. It hastened Islamist participation in Afghan resistance politics.

With Nasser close to the Soviet camp, the US searched for allies to lead a Muslim world in an anticommunist direction. The Soviets had themselves implemented a win-the-hearts-and-minds initiative to showcase the compatibility of the Soviet model of modernisation with Islam. They were keen to show Muslim-majority Soviet states, such as Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, making progress. They backed the Palestinian cause, earning them good will among Muslim societies, and they reinstated Islamic celebrations in Muslim states based in Central Asia. The US, in its cold war rivalry with the Soviets, looked first at Turkey for its Westernisation project under Atatürk to become a potential model to advance the capitalist-modernisation theory and influence other Muslim nations. But Atatürk's reforms had become deeply divisive. The US hedged its bets and promoted pan-Islamist Pakistan as an anticommunist ally, recognising the limits of Turkey's resonance across the Muslim world. But neither Pakistan nor Turkey were enough to overcome the influence of Soviet-aligned Nasser among postcolonial Arab nations. The Western bloc sought Muslim leadership and increasingly came to view Islam and the imagined, modern Muslim world as a bulwark against communism.

# Islamic Authority in Crisis, Defeat by Israel and a King for All

For the postcolonial monarchies in which traditional elites maintained their position of political power after independence, religious dignitaries were kept as prominent actors in society. But for those in which new urban groups succeeded in driving away the old social and political elites, the Islamic establishment was sidelined and religious endowments seized by the state. The religious clergy were put on state salaries instead and they became government employees, thereby removing their independence.

Islam did not vanish from popular culture but, from the 1960s, it was carefully handled and fostered to assist with the legitimacy of political regimes. In socialist Arab countries, such as Egypt, Syria and Iraq, textbooks and pamphlets were updated to teach the inherent socialist nature of Islam. As official Islam became explicitly politicised, a crisis of Islamic authority that had long been developing since the Ottoman Empire's collapse intensified. In most Muslim countries, the state aspired to become gatekeepers to authority, dismissing Islamic scholars who did not toe the line and banning certain subjects and books from the curricula of Islamic institutions. The scope of the education received in institutions such as Al-Azhar were gradually and severely limited by the state, and salaries deliberately kept low and unappealing so that religious scholarship would not attract the most ambitious. As the educational standards dropped in these institutions, students graduated without the skills to think critically and engage effectively as experts in Islamic law. By design, they were less able to effectively critique the state's activities, but they were equally hindered in terms of regulating the misuse of Islam by non-state actors too.

The problem of the authority vacuum was not so much that *no one* could authoritatively speak for Islam, but that virtually *anyone* with a modest degree of knowledge on the Quran and the Hadith could. [30] This included Muslims unfamiliar with the technical discipline of complex interpretive practices and sophisticated methodologies of social and textual analysis. Self-taught thinkers came to issues without knowledge of the precedents, debates and accomplishments of previous generations. Self-proclaimed experts with engineering, medical and scientific backgrounds became more and more common. The early leaders of most Islamist movements, including the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda, were among this trend. They were not interested in furthering the integrity or development of Islamic law or thought. The objective of these self-proclaimed experts was instead to overcome the pervasive sense of powerlessness and to restore the pride of Muslims by using Islam as a symbol of resistance and defiance.

The systematic regulation and, often, exploitation of Islam by Arab-nationalist regimes, which were otherwise staunchly secular, exacerbated this crisis in religious authority felt across the Muslim world. The cooption of Al-Azhar University by Nasser's government is one such example but more

demonstrable is the act of Saddam Hussein, as leader of the zealously secular Ba'athist party in Iraq, putting "God is Great" on the national flag and filling his public speeches with statements about the duty of jihad in a failed attempt to mobilise Iraqis to defend his regime.

The exploitation of Islam by Arab-nationalist regimes in the 1950s and 1960s garnered very little credibility but it did fan the flames of Islamism so that, by the time pan-Arab ideologies were hit with the defeat of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and Arab armies lost Jerusalem, Muslim societies were well-primed to ignore the Islamists' own exploitation of the fundamentals of their faith. The Arab defeat in the 1967 war was a catastrophic blow both to Nasser's and the Ba'athists' pan-Arabism because it exposed the weaknesses and limitations of a strong united Arab front. But the loss of Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa mosque to Israel also symbolised the downfall of the Muslims, allowing Islamists who had been keeping the discourse on Islamic civilisation alive to use the event as a sign of God's anger – and the final blow to Islam's former glory.

After the loss of Jerusalem in 1967, and the increase in the numbers of Palestinian refugees, the feeling that secular governments had neither developed their nations nor restored to Muslims their sense of pride became more widespread. Conservative Muslims would later call 1967 a divine punishment for relinquishing faith in the decades before. The 1967 defeat seriously undermined the ideological edifice of nationalism and it created an ideological and leadership vacuum once again.

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a revival in Islam, driven by a combination of Islamist groups and non-state actors as well as Muslim political leaders. The immediate aftermath of the 1967 defeat was not only a boon to Islamists but also an opportunity for leftist students with European Marxist ideals to challenge the Nasserist brand of socialism. They championed instead the rising Palestinian resistance with the 1969 arrival of Yasser Arafat as head of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), and protests erupted after the deadly clash between Jordan and Palestinian refugees in 1970's "Black September", which showed not the Jewish state but the government of an Arab nation attacking downtrodden Palestinians. Arab states quickly mobilised resources against this leftist threat, assuming it was modelled on the Western student protests of 1968. In the Black September events in Amman, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood had supported King Hussein during the showdown with the Palestinians, and this lesson was not lost on Arab leaders.


## King Faisal – A Saudi King for All Muslims

King Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud's role in reviving Muslim-world solidarity during the period of transition between postwar efforts of independence and the late 1970s was decisive. From his youth, long before assuming power as king, Faisal had considered himself to be a Muslim leader above all. From 1925, when the Saudi state conquered the region of Hejaz, Faisal was placed in charge of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina – sites of pilgrimage for all Muslims. The following year, he took part in the Mecca-based

Muslim congress and, after the second world war, he embraced the Palestinian cause as a symbol of enduring Muslim suffering and humiliation. By 1958 when he became prime minister, Faisal focused his foreign affairs on deepening bilateral ties with Muslim-majority nations in Africa and Asia. He supported the establishment of the Muslim World League and the Islamic University of Madinah – both intrinsic to Saudi Arabia's soft power thereafter. By the time he became king in 1964, he actively pursued the creation of a Muslim bloc at the UN's General Assembly and in 1965 he tried but failed to gather Muslim leaders for a special meeting during that year's Arab League Summit.

King Faisal's vision of a Muslim constituency, with Saudi Arabia at its core, was shaped by the politics of the cold war and his resistance to Egypt's then-popular, pan-Arab, Global South solidarity movement led by Nasser. Before 1967, efforts to revive Muslim consciousness and create a sense of religious solidarity were out of vogue compared to Nasser's Arab unification efforts. But after military defeat in 1967, when Arab armies had attempted to liberate Palestinians and failed catastrophically, resulting in the loss of Jerusalem, the humiliation tainted the notion of a powerful Arab bloc. An attack on the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem – Islam's third-most sacred site – by a Christian zealot in 1969 further galvanised calls for Muslim solidarity and altered the political landscape against the pan-Arab movement and in favour of King Faisal's project based on Muslim unity. [31]

Soon after 1967, even secular nationalist Muslim leaders came to acknowledge the shared issues facing Muslim populations and accepted an invitation from King Faisal to meet for a summit held in Morocco in September 1969. For this first Islamic summit, Faisal brought together heads of state and government representatives of Afghanistan, Algeria, Chad, Guinea, Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Pakistan, Somalia, Southern Yemen, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Republic (then Egypt), Yemen Arab Republic, the Muslim community of India and representatives from the Palestine Liberation Organisation. Convinced that their common creed constituted a factor on which to base cooperation and mutual assistance, Faisal placed Palestine and its Muslim holy sites at the top of the agenda. Compared to the king's failed attempt to convene Muslim leaders four years earlier during the Arab League Summit, the general psyche began to shift towards the reconception of a Muslim world. The role of Saudi Arabia changed significantly and King Faisal's elevated image as an experienced pan-Islamic leader became more politically significant.

To legitimise Saudi Arabia's claim to leadership of the Muslim world, King Faisal needed the support of pan-Islamist thinkers and he succeeded in securing it. Travelling to and paying personal attention to Muslim-majority states and foreign leaders of Muslim minorities turned him into an icon of transnational Muslim solidarity during the cold war. He had clout among Pakistani pan-Islamist thinkers who regarded him and his support for their pioneer Mawdudi as evidence that he was a loyal sponsor of pan-Islamist projects across the Muslim world. Faisal was also supported by Egypt's Islamist opposition throughout the Nasserist ascendancy, and he provided Muslim Brotherhood intellectuals with refuge and protection in Saudi Arabia when they were banned by Nasser's regime. Pan-Islamists sought out Faisal just as he did

them. His activities and Saudi Arabia's oil wealth raised expectations of the Muslim world's influence on the global stage.

> **Case Study: "Petro-Islam" – A New Network of Islamic Activism and Wahhabism**
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> With the discovery of oil, the Middle East became more important to the world economy, dramatically assisting Saudi Arabia's resistance to Nasser's domination. By the mid-1960s, the five largest Arab oil-producing countries – namely Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Algeria – were able to generate between them $2.75 billion a year. [32] By the 1970s, the Saudi development budget alone reached $40 billion a year. [33]
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> These substantial revenues were used to rapidly advance the industrial infrastructure of these nations and extend social services to growing cities. In the Arabian Peninsula, the changes were most stark. The Arabian Gulf's rapidly modernising societies attracted large numbers of economic migrants and foreign workers from across the Arab world as well as from South Asian countries because the indigenous populations of these young peninsula states were too small and underskilled to meet the development surge. By the early 1970s, Saudi Arabia's oil revenue had soared as it became a valuable commodity. Thousands of Americans – from engineers and accountants to doctors and developers – arrived to help build up and profit from Saudi's booming economy. American hotel chains were built almost overnight and hundreds of foreign companies opened their offices within these first few years. The Arabian Gulf became a magnet for the region as highly educated Egyptians, Syrians and Lebanese flocked to Saudi Arabia to offer their services, sending money back home to their families and raising the bar of ambition and wealth beyond the kingdom's borders. In 1975 an estimated 43 per cent of the population in Saudi Arabia consisted of foreign workers from Yemen, Oman, Egypt and Pakistan. [34]
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> Access to modern education soared. By 1980 there were an estimated 1 million children in schools, including large numbers of girls, approximately 40,000 students in Saudi colleges and 15,000 studying abroad. By 1989 these numbers had more than doubled, with an estimated 2.5 million students in the country of whom 1.6 million were girls. [35] Increasing numbers of Saudis were trained in oil extraction, commerce, finance and communications as well as in agriculture and the ministry. With this demand for skilled labour, many exiled Islamists arrived in Saudi Arabia and offered their services as lecturers in the newly built Islamic University of Madinah, which the Saudis established in 1961 to attract students and Muslims from around the world to convey the "eternal message of Islam". Many Muslim Brotherhood members who had been driven out of Egypt settled in the kingdom and were influential in the design of the curriculum at the university, which would go on to become a leading institution exporting Salafist ideas. The university is also where Sayyid Qutb's brother, Muhammad Qutb, would eventually base himself to publish and disseminate his "martyred" brother's seminal Islamist writings.

The presence of Islamists did not concern the Saudis as it had leaders of other Arab-nationalist and socialist countries in the 1950s and 1960s. The Saudi monarchy felt it could contain Islamism and make it serve the kingdom's interests. Unlike Nasser and others, the Saudi rulers were able to deflect much criticism and judgement from Islamists for three reasons. The first was their custodianship of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, which bestowed on the rulers a special degree of legitimacy albeit not akin to the level of a caliph; the second was the kingdom's active and responsive religious clergy that were afforded more freedoms and sponsorship than in other modern Arab nations; and the third was their favourable foreign policies that cultivated Islamic identity above Arab national identities. But it was not so easy for the Al Saud (House of Saud) to resist left-wing nationalist sentiment and as the numbers of Saudi labourers grew, so did the appetite for left-wing politics. The Arabian American Oil Company's workers strike of 1953 was a taste of the mobilising power of global-left ideas and the fear after this was that this instinct to revolt would spread to the Shia-majority Eastern province.

By the early 1970s, Islamism was not only tolerated by the Saudis but welcomed. A growing constituency of Wahhabi clerics and Islamist activists, nicknamed the "petro-Islam", regarded Nasserism and the socialist alliance as the enemy. They promoted a strict and austere implementation of the Islamic law in political, moral and cultural spheres, but they were not as revolutionary as they were when based in their home countries; they now in fact advocated loyalty towards the Al Saud dynasty. This network benefited greatly from Saudi Arabia's oil wealth and foreign-policy objectives. Through this wealth, Saudi rulers sought to obtain a position of greater influence in Arab affairs and so they began giving aid on a large scale to poorer states and nongovernmental initiatives when it served their interests. The Muslim World League, a nongovernmental organisation founded and funded by the Saudis in 1962, had the stated objective of "Wahhabising" Islam worldwide as a challenge to Nasser's influence. It raised funds to build mosques and religious missionaries while subsidising Islamic associations and distributing the writings of approved Islamic scholars. The "petro-Islam" network of Wahhabi clerics and Muslim Brothers meanwhile helped to identify beneficiaries and administer and implement the league's activities.

Migration to Saudi Arabia for many skilled Arab, African and Asian Muslims had a profound impact when these workers returned home having in most cases grown richer and more conservatively devout. The windfall of funds coming from Gulf emigrants to countries such as Pakistan, Sudan, Syria and Egypt was in the billions, and work in the Gulf and associated remittances offered welcome relief in these nations that were experiencing fast population growth because it lightened the burden on public services. Social ascent for many of those returning from the Gulf went hand-in-hand with the intensification of religious practice. The re-adoption of the hijab by wives of Gulf emigrants made modesty more fashionable, and the title hajja (those who perform the pilgrimage to Mecca) became a common new title of respect, reflecting this growing piety.

# Muslim Solidarity and the Reactivation of Religious Politics

A strategy of containing religion, on which all Arab Muslim leaders could rely, had come to an end. Many Muslim regimes contending with leftist opposition regarded the activities of the Islamists as a bulwark against communist encroachment. Saudi Arabia, under King Faisal, was promoting itself as the centre of pan-Islamic thought. Anwar Sadat, the new Egyptian president who had been able to consolidate his power following Nasser's death in 1970, arrested pro-Soviet Nasser supporters as part of a "corrective revolution" that sought to manoeuvre his country into the US camp. He ended Nasser's socialist policies and economically opened up Egypt for business. He tightened his country's alliance with Saudi Arabia too and worked to neutralise left-leaning opposition by relaxing many restrictions on the Islamists. He released the Muslim Brothers who had been jailed by Nasser, and they gravitated towards the fertile political ground of Egyptian universities, where Marxist politics had until then been gaining popularity among students. In 1973, when the Egyptian army turned the tide and showed a level of strength against Israel, Sadat gained a short-lived reputation as both a pan-Arab and pan-Islamic hero – and his alliance with Saudi paid off with the Saudi-led oil embargo.

The oil embargo that began in 1973 proved to be the peak expression of soft power for Saudi Arabia as it leveraged its growing influence and spending might. In the aftermath of the 1973 war with Israel, the Saudis cohosted the Second Islamic Summit with Pakistan in Lahore, to which all Muslim-majority countries sent official representatives. The 1974 summit was in many ways the most successful pan-Islamic event of the cold war era, demonstrating new levels of Muslim unity under the leadership of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. It was seen to bring together the collective power of the Muslim world, and it would translate into the exercise of this power as a voting bloc at the UN General Assembly on issues of Palestinian interest the following year.

> The oil embargo that began in 1973 proved to be the peak expression of soft power for Saudi Arabia as it leveraged its growing influence and spending might.

Despite having mobilised Muslim solidarity, the condition of the Palestinians had not changed, and pan-Islamist expectations were not matched by real-world political gains. The failures of socialism and Nasser's pan-Arabism had led to greater Saudi influence under Faisal, true, but long after the king's death in 1975, the Palestinians had still not seen any improvements to their situation. And so the Palestinian cause became – rightly or wrongly – the measure of the effectiveness of Muslim political leaders on the world stage. A revolutionary pan-Islamic discourse developed, which was both critical of Saudi Arabia and anti-American in nature. From 1978 until 1980, a series of turning-point events – the Camp David Accords, Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan – helped to channel rising expectations of pan-Islamic popular opinion.

This new pan-Islamic expression would redefine the Muslim world as a postcolonial region still humiliated by the US and its European allies, and equally held back by corrupt Muslim elites poised to enact the West's self-serving policies.


## The Camp David Accords

Sadat's peace with Israel at Camp David in 1978 betrayed both the pan-Arab and pan-Islamic solidarity that surrounded the Palestinian cause. Though it was never intended to fulfil this mission, the peace deal had done nothing to solve the major Palestinian problems and it frustrated the rising pan-Islamic expectations that had followed Egypt's alliance with Saudi Arabia after Nasser's death. Egypt had effectively abandoned its key role in the Palestinian liberation struggle and therefore relinquished a pillar of its fragile legitimacy. Anti-Sadat emotions ran high among the pan-Islamists and Arabs, resulting in Egypt's expulsion from the Arab League. [36] Saudi Arabia was left as the only obvious leadership alternative, having still retained some of its credentials on the Palestinian cause and despite its close alliance with the United States.

Sadat had thought himself safe to push boundaries after 1973. He had emphasised time and again his commitment to his faith, amending the Egyptian constitution to place greater emphasis on the nation's Islamic identity and invoking the name of Allah in his speeches to the people. He had, in his mind, effectively coerced the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist factions in Egypt. But by 1979 it was apparent that Sadat had significantly underestimated the Islamist forces, not just at home but also abroad where they had hijacked protests in Iran and were challenging the legitimacy of the Saudi state in a siege of Mecca's Grand Mosque. Occupied by obsessive political posturing in relation to the West and managing the subsequent domestic fallout, Sadat had taken his eye off the rapidly changing region around him that, following the death of his charismatic predecessor Nasser, was undergoing a crisis of political and ideological leadership. The void was gradually being filled, not by a figurehead with an idea but by an idea with competing figureheads and firebrands. Islam, not an imagined Arab collective, had become the instrument with which to challenge the new status quo.

Islamist movements were gathering strength on university campuses across the Arab world. A chasm had opened between the social aspirations of the growing ranks of university students and their ability to find jobs. The students were of the first generation to be born in the era of independence that was coming of age across most of the Arab and Muslim world. They had no memory of the anticolonial tide of liberation that had legitimised the nationalist regimes under which they lived, and they had not been born early enough to benefit from the initial economic gains of related policies. By the 1970s, the quality of education in these universities showed no improvement on the 1950s despite the doubling of student numbers in most cases. Modern secular values and education began to be called into question. Islamists active on campuses offered an alternative vision of Islam as a transformational system with a "complete and total" solution, pairing it with practical solutions to address students' immediate frustrations, whether arranging minibuses exclusively for those wearing the veil or addressing overcrowding in classrooms via the introduction of gender segregation. [37]

Until 1977, when Sadat had flown to Jerusalem to initiate his peace talks with Israel, the Egyptian government and the Islamists were allies. But when Sadat made his historic trip, the Islamists denounced "the shameful peace with the Jews". In turn, he responded by clamping down and suppressing the Muslim Brotherhood as well as the other factions of Islamists that had emerged in the 1970s. The Islamists – many by now ultra-radical – continued to operate underground and plot Sadat's assassination.

## The Ripple Effects of the Iranian Revolution

The developments of the decade had affected a limited number of people but, after 1979, there was nobody within or outside the Muslim world who was unaware of militant Islamism. Indeed, Iran's unexpected Islamic Revolution of 1979 was born of the decade's resurgent pan-Islamism. Asserting his claim to leadership of the Muslim world, Ayatollah Khomeini articulated many pan-Islamic grievances – the humiliation of Western imperialism, US hegemony in the Middle East and Palestinian suffering. During his long exile from Iran and his activism when he settled in the Iraqi holy city of Najaf, Khomeini would have been acutely aware of the demands for a new Muslim transnationalism. So, when Khomeini's followers overthrew the last shah in 1979 and announced the establishment of an Islamic Republic of Iran, support for the oppressed in the Muslim world was a primary objective of this new revolutionary Iranian government.

The toppling of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, an important ally, was a blow to Saudi Arabia. Yet on the face of it, revolutionary Iran had more in common with the kingdom than the kingdom had, for instance, with Sadat's Egypt. Nevertheless, the revolution marked a turn for the worse in the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia, resulting in the severing of a once-strong alliance between two Muslim nations. When the Iranian shah had visited Saudi Arabia on several previous occasions, he had been greeted by cheerful crowds including girls draped in Saudi and Iranian flags, reciting poetry about the love between

the two Muslim nations. The sectarian conflict of the so-called Shia-Sunni strife, often used today to explain the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, was not a factor in the pre-1979 relationship. Both countries were part of the Safari Club, an alliance of intelligence services set up in 1976 by Iran, Saudi, Morocco, Egypt and France to foment anti-Soviet operations from Africa to Asia. Both dynasties – the Pahlavis and the Al Sauds – had come to power around the same time and contended with the rapid modernisation and adjustments that come with the discovery of oil. When Khomeini assumed power in Iran, the Saudis were initially silent before congratulating the ayatollah, shocked as they were at how easily the Americans had abandoned such a stalwart ally as Iran. [38] But Khomeini had made his enmity towards the "camel grazers of Riyadh and the barbarians of the Najd" abundantly clear in his 1945 book *Kashf al-Asrar* (*Unveiling of Secrets*). [39] He was determined to challenge the House of Saud's custodianship of Mecca and Medina now that his revolution had succeeded in removing the shah. He had singled out the US as the "Great Satan" and condemned Muslim leaders for assisting in and perpetuating its hegemony in the Middle East. This was a direct attack on Saudi policy.

> Khomeini had made his enmity towards the "camel grazers of Riyadh and the barbarians of the Najd" abundantly clear in his 1945 book.

By the time of Sadat's assassination at the hands of Egyptian Islamists in 1981, the clerics firmly held power in Iran and Islamic revolutionary fervour had begun to spread. Saudi Arabia had become the target of Ayatollah Khomeini's focus as he actively agitated against the House of Saud. Mounting challenges to legitimacy had put the royal house on a defensive footing and the Saudis became evermore determined to contain the Iranian Revolution and position themselves as the sole defenders of the Muslim faith across all domains – from education to culture, politics to battlegrounds. Just as King Faisal had deployed oil wealth to counter pan-Arab nationalism and communism, his Saudi house would deploy all tools at its disposal towards a systematic and focused global campaign, this time quadrupling its funding. In 1962, Saudi funding for their World Assembly of Muslim Youth was $250,000 a year. By 1980, funding was raised to $13 million and by 1999, the spending had reached $22 million for "services to Islam and Muslims" globally. [40]

By 1980 the House of Saud was funding billions of dollars towards Saddam Hussein's war against Khomeini's Iran. The war became personal to Saudi Arabia as Iran had requested "observer rights" over Mecca and Medina in any negotiated settlement for peace, with Khomeini openly stirring for control of

the holy sites. By 1981, Saudi forces clashed violently with Iranian pilgrims for distributing posters of Khomeini and chanting his name throughout the processions. Saudi authorities had already come under fire across the Muslim world for contradicting a prophetic saying that warned against violence on the holy sites. The Saudi reaction to the siege of the Grand Mosque of Mecca in 1979 had forced the kingdom to confront the rebels through force, and the decision to do so had been widely frowned upon by Muslims within and outside the kingdom. Saudi's Western allies came under attack too, accused of the so-called Sacrilege of Mecca.

A more formal programme to disseminate revolutionary literature via Iranian pilgrims during the *hajj* had begun by 1984, supervised by Khomeini himself from a dedicated office within the organs of the Iranian state. Clashes would continue and the more Saudi officials resisted, the more they came under criticism for breaching the codes of conduct. This persistent and direct challenge to the House of Saud's legitimacy spurred King Fahd (successor to Kings Faisal and Khalid) to officially adopt the title "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques", formerly binding together the House of Saud and the House of God.

A reversal of modernisation projects initiated in the 1970s, which had come about under increasing Western influence, was underway in Saudi Arabia in the hope of placating the extreme elements that had been galvanised by events and in reasserting the nation's standing as the rightful ruler of Islam's holiest sites. The push and pull between clerics and royals had been a constant balancing act in modern Saudi politics and the results of this tension were determined by the personality of each successive king and his standing with the faithful. King Faisal had been most historically adept at bending the religious establishment to his will. His success at introducing television and education for girls despite the clerics' resistance was an indicator of his control and influence. He would send dignitaries to placate and persuade the most conservative sections of the religious establishment; they were often members of the Muslim Brotherhood from Syria or Egypt who had fled repression in their own countries decades earlier. King Faisal's reputation as a devout and austere man had allowed him more latitude to introduce aspects of modernisation that he felt would benefit his country. But after 1979, and agitation by Khomeini and sympathetic groups threatening the House of Saud, that latitude was no longer present.

Hotels and cinemas were closed and boarded off and music concerts cancelled. Female presenters were removed from television shows and their faces blacked out on magazines and newspapers. The *Sahwa* or Islamic awakening had begun. The Saudi royal dynasty's commitment to advancing a puritanical, absolutist and unwavering version of Islam, which had formed the basis of Ibn Saud's alliance with Wahhabi clerics during the creation of Saudi Arabia in the 1920s, was now firmly entrenched. Prayer times were strictly enforced, and the religious police were handed more funding and new powers to penalise Saudis not adhering to strict Islamic morals.

The ripple effect of the Iranian Revolution and Khomeini's determined policy to undermine the Saudi monarchy's standing in the Muslim world, and at home, threated the Saudi legitimacy that had been

carefully constructed across its own territory over the century – and with Muslim nations in the previous decade. The post-1979 result was that two conflicting strategies for dominating the Muslim world were in play: Iran strived to replace the supremacy of the Saudis with that of Khomeini, targeting a younger Islamist network belonging to the radical fringes of societies while also downplaying the Shia identity of the revolution it sought to export; Saudi Arabia meanwhile attempted to deploy its decade-old system involving Islam's proselytisation worldwide in order to counter and drown out the Khomeinist ideology. The Saudis took special care to highlight the Shia origins of the Iranian Revolution in order to denounce it as a vehicle for Persian nationalism.

Saddam Hussein's war with Iran in 1980 – supported by Arab monarchies and the West – was a perfect illustration of how the Iranian Revolution intensified the politicisation of Islam, and how appropriation of its vocabulary became a shared tactic on all sides in a quest for power and legitimacy. Throughout the war between Iran and Iraq, both sides claimed to have Islamic supremacy. Saddam's supporters conjured references to the Battle of al-Qadisiyyah of 636, during which Arabs had fought and triumphed over the Sasanian Persians, throughout their military offensives. Iran's offensives were named instead after the battles won by the first caliph, Abu Bakr, against rebel Arabian tribes.

The revolutionary enthusiasm of the Khomeinists found its principal expression, however, in the gradual Islamisation of the conflicts in Palestine and Lebanon. Neither had been particularly influenced by religious ideology prior to the revolution in Iran. For Palestinian activists, the revolution became a source of inspiration for jihad as Khomeinism became a channel through which to criticise the nationalism of the PLO, which had gained nothing for the Palestinians on the ground. They equally condemned the gradualism of the Muslim Brotherhood of Palestine who had forsaken the political struggle in favour of charitable work and preaching. Iran's victorious Islamic revolution demonstrated to Khomeini's supporters in Palestine that even against an enemy as formidable as the shah – with his Western allies – a jihad of militants could overcome all obstacles. This strategy manifested itself through the creation of the Islamic Jihad organisation in Palestine. Greater still, though, was the Iranian Revolution's impact on Lebanon. Civil war there since 1975 had created a clear political vacuum and struggle. The collapse of the Lebanese state, the fragmentation of the country into enclaves controlled by rival militias and the various foreign contingents based there all favoured Iran's revolutionary model. Within the milieu following the collapse of the Lebanese state – namely the competing Maronite, Druze, Syrian, Israeli, Shia and Sunni interests – Iran wedged itself into the vacuum, establishing and resourcing the Lebanese Hizbullah. The militant group blended the social violence of the young disinherited Shia, aspirations of martyrdom among Khomeinist preachers, and the political interests of Iran and Syria, which used their acts of terrorism to further their own objectives: both sought to annihilate Israel and vanquish the West from Lebanon.

# The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and Deployment of Jihadists

Just as the Iranian Revolution was coming to a head and immediately after the takeover of the US Embassy in Tehran, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in order to secure the oppressive and beleaguered communist government of Nur Mohammad Taraki. With the invasion, the Islamist question became part and parcel of the wider US-Soviet struggle. The US strategy of containment, designed to "trap the Russian bear", resulted in massive aid being sent to the Afghan resistance, a large proportion of whose members belonged to the Islamist movement. Saudi Arabia and the wealthy Gulf monarchies, glad to join the US in order to keep the Soviets out of their backyard, contributed freely to this Afghan jihad. Muslim states viewed the jihad as an outlet for radical agitators and a chance to distract extremists from the Islamic Revolution. By making the Afghan jihad the central militant cause of the 1980s, the anti-Americanism that Khomeini was fanning was paused for some time. The Soviets would replace the US as the "Great Satan", not so much for Khomeini but at least among the many Sunni Islamists who joined the mujahideen. By 1982, the jihad was receiving $600 million in US aid per year, with the equivalent amount matched by the Gulf states. [41]

Iran was sympathetic to the Afghan jihad but its opposition to the US prevented full-throttle support for the US-backed resistance. This left Saudi Arabia with a relatively clear field in which to peddle its influence. The Saudis pushed for Islamic unity with Mecca and Medina at the centre of a global Wahhabi network aligned against the Soviets. Iran rejected the superpowers entirely and argued that its brand of Islam was the only true path to the salvation of Muslims.

Meanwhile, the Afghanistan conflict provided a networking opportunity for an entire generation of jihadists, leading directly to the creation of al-Qaeda and its successors, and to a wave of Islamist violence across the world. All the Salafi-jihadist groups in the Middle East and Africa that have created and exploited new hubs of conflict today can be traced to this Afghan network in some way. With a few exceptions, the current crop of leaders in the global jihadist movement either met in the Afghan conflict or were later brought in by members of that formative period. In the camps and training grounds around Peshawar – the capital of Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province where millions of Afghan refugees were living – there was a great gathering of international Islamists. Arabs mixed with Afghans and other Muslims from all corners of the world and exchanged ideas. Arab funds, abundant US arsenal and the illicit trading of heroin were the life source for these men. This network of Islamists developed its own logic that, before long, turned against its original patrons.

The Afghan jihad saw itself as an offshoot of ordinary Muslim society, and it rode a wave of popular approval not unlike the one Khomeini enjoyed with his exaltation of "Islam of the people". At the start,

religious clergy issued fatwas interpreting the Soviet advance as an invasion of the "land of Islam" by the impious. This made it possible to proclaim a defensive jihad which, according to the sharia, obliged every individual Muslim to participate as expressed by *fard al-ayn*. The call was delicate, however, because not all Muslim-majority countries – in particular, those aligned with the Soviet Union – supported the resistance, making the new fatwas a threat to social order in those nations. The absence of a hierarchy of Islamic authority also meant it was very easy to manipulate the edicts, which is exactly what happened in the late 1980s.

> # The Afghan jihad saw itself as an offshoot of ordinary Muslim society, and it rode a wave of popular approval.

The first generation of literate, urbanised Afghans was educated in the refugee camps of Peshawar, where Islamists from across the world gathered before joining the battlefield. As a circumstance of their exiled status, this impoverished young generation had become detribalised and thus receptive to Islamist ideologies. An educational effort led by Afghan Islamist leaders close to the Arab contingents of the mujahideen as well as the South Asian-based network of Deobandi madrassas sought to recruit the children of refugees to the spirit of jihad. In the decade that followed, these Afghans came of age and formed the mainstay of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Sunni extremist militants of the *Sipah-e-Sahaba* (Army of the Companions of the Prophet) in Pakistan, who massacred Shia communities and carried the jihad to Kashmir.

Most notably, the Arab contingent of the Afghan jihad actually played only a minor role in fighting the Soviet army. For the Islamists who had travelled to fight, the journey to Peshawar was primarily an initiation and socialising event. Thereafter, for some of them, it also turned into a radicalisation process as they encountered more extreme militants, many of whom had already served prison sentences in their own countries.

> ### Case Study: Algeria's "Dirty" Civil War
>
> In the same year the Bosnian war began, another civil conflict erupted in which Islamism played a central role. Between 1992 and 1997, bloody confrontations took place between the Algerian secular army and Islamist militants that resulted in the massacre of ordinary citizens on both sides of the conflict. Later dubbed Algeria's "Dirty Civil War", it instigated a new chapter in political and violent Islamism, with two major developments occurring as a result of the war dynamics. The first was the development and mobilisation of the concept of *takfirism*, in other words the legitimacy of

killing fellow Muslims on the basis of apostasy. This ideological mechanism enabling Islamists to "lawfully" murder coreligionists became a matter of essential practicality by the time of the Algerian conflict because jihad was no longer an attack primarily on an invading outside force, as it had been previously in the case of Afghanistan. The second development was the concerted targeting of the West not only in so-called Muslim lands but also on its own territory. The civil war galvanised Islamist militants engaged in the Algerian conflict to launch attacks on French citizens throughout the 1990s, both in Algeria and within French borders. Algerians, who had formerly fought in Afghanistan alongside the mujahideen, had reconnected with the most extreme elements of their own country's local Islamist factions, thereby radicalising a new generation of violent Islamists who would later join forces with al-Qaeda. This globalisation of the Algerian war may not have occurred had it not been for the first Afghan jihad and the networking opportunities it had created for militant Islamists across the Arab world.

Much of Algeria's postcolonial history points to the conditions that would lead to the civil war. Although the modern state of Algeria, following its independence from France in 1962, prided itself on its nationalist, socialist characteristics, its citizens proved to be the most receptive regionally to the Islamist discourse that had swept the Middle East and North Africa from the 1970s onwards. Algerian expressions of Islamism were especially nationalistic from the early 20th century despite the contradictions. The association of the French empire with Christianity, and the bitter and bloody struggle for independence and self-determination, had served to revive ideas of Islam and nationalism in equal measure. Islamism had therefore been present from the start of Algeria's chapter of modernity, offering many citizens the means to securing the authenticity of the nation-state. In the 1970s, there had been an open debate between the liberal, modernising Muslims of Algeria – those who held that Western sciences and administration could be advantageous to their citizens – and those who followed the purist position of the Muslim Brotherhood as well as local Islamist figureheads such as Abd al-Hamid Ben Badis. As these open debates failed in revealing a decisive victor, an independent Muslim community life flourished in resistance to the state and its attempted control of unofficial mosques and schools. Muslim-led opposition had grown to include greater influence for the Muslim Brotherhood. From its establishment, the Algerian state had borne the scars of war and was mistrusted by its own population. Government efforts to control Islam and replace institutions with government-approved systems of Islamic learning did not have the chance to develop and, consequently, the religious vacuum was filled by Islamist parties who were able to sweep in and win elections in both 1989 and 1991.

By the time the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in February 1989, the formative network of al-Qaeda that would drive the global violent Islamist movement was already flourishing. With Osama bin Laden's 1996 and 1998 declarations of war against Americans, Jews and Crusaders – backed by leading signatories from violent Islamist groups in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia – the message was becoming clear: "Fight the pagans all together … until there is no more tumult or oppression."

After 1989, the dispersal of militant Islamists, who had formerly been concentrated in Kabul and Peshawar, to all parts of the world accelerated and resulted in a lightning expansion of radical Islamism in both Muslim countries and the West. Battle-hardened veterans of the Afghan jihad left Afghanistan in search of new conflicts and fronts from which to strike the "godless". Two months prior to bin Laden's first declaration of war, Saudi Arabia and coalition forces were targeted by Iran, via Hizbullah, during the 1996 bombing of Khobar Towers (at the time, a complex based in the Saudi city to house coalition personnel). And six months after bin Laden's final call for a united Islamic front in 1998, al-Qaeda suicide bombers drove truck bombs into US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 224 people and wounding more than 4,500. Far from its bases in Afghanistan and later Sudan, al-Qaeda showed the world its commitment to its declaration and its resolve to inflict mass-casualty attacks abroad. Another attack followed on US assets in Yemen in 2000, as al-Qaeda entered a period of formal and informal organisational mergers with smaller, local insurgent groups across the Muslim-majority world.

Throughout the 1990s, bin Laden forged links with violent Islamist groups from Morocco to Iraq, Mali to Somalia and Myanmar to Indonesia, while providing resources and assistance for insurgencies in Pakistan, the Philippines and Tajikistan. Yet even during this violent period of Islamist insurgencies, these fights were viewed by al-Qaeda as local struggles with a limited jihadist vision. For bin Laden and his co-leadership, the jihadist forces needed a grander vision, strategy and, above all, common enemy. From 1998, the network set about organising the 9/11 attacks.

# Scars of the Satanic Verses and the Bosnian War

Following the hostage-taking of US embassy personnel in Tehran in November 1979, and a series of Westerners kidnapped in Lebanon throughout the 1980s, Western media reported almost exclusively on a militant Islamic world. When Ayatollah Khomeini issued his fatwa in 1988 encouraging the murder of Salman Rushdie in response to the author's novel *The Satanic Verses* followed by scenes of symbolic book burnings organised by Muslims around the world, including on UK streets, the narrative of Muslims rejecting Western modernity and liberal values was further reinforced. The leadership of the Muslim world was now claimed not by a caliph or king eager to maintain his standing in the international system, but by a cleric who completely denounced the system altogether. Khomeini's call for Muslims in the West to protest against and punish Rushdie echoed similar elements to those of King Faisal's in the past. But Khomeini took it in a wholly different direction. While Faisal was hoping to empower the Muslim bloc in the UN system through alliance with, not enmity towards, the West, Khomeini sought to inspire disorder and revolt by influencing Muslim public opinion directly via Western satellite television.

> **Case Study: The Emergence of a British Islamism**
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> Islamist activism in Britain spiked in the 1990s, reflected broadly by a rise in the number of organisations that emerged to meet the welfare demands of Muslims in the country. For most of the 1980s and indeed before, Muslim organisations in Britain and elsewhere across Europe had operated at the local level but, by the end of the decade, they became more visible and coordinated at the national level especially around issues of halal meat and education. In 1963, there were as few as 13 registered mosques in Britain, a figure that had risen to 839 registered and unregistered mosques and 950 other Muslim organisations nationwide by 1990. [42]
>
> The first Gulf and Algerian civil wars of 1991, the Bosnian war of 1992, conflict escalations in Kashmir in the mid-1990s and, notably, the earlier *Satanic Verses* controversy of 1988 all contributed to the rise of Muslim charities and organisations focusing on issues beyond UK borders. Many Islamists from the Middle East also found refuge in Britain following clampdowns in Egypt, Algeria and Libya, inspiring a new nickname for the capital of "Londonistan".
>
> By the mid-1990s, groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and al-Muhajiroun began to manipulate the unified Muslim solidarity that responses to world conflicts were cultivating. These groups not only proselytised narratives of British indifference to the plight of Muslims, but also overlaid them with conspiracies of Western and Jewish involvement in conflicts such as the Gulf war. Rather than champion the eclectic and diverse character of Muslim communities living in the country, they encouraged active non-assimilation.

Saudi Arabia had condemned *The Satanic Verses* at a meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference but refrained from threatening the author's life. Khomeini's public and fiery stoking of tensions, and the emotive reaction from some Muslims, consequently painted entire Muslim communities living in the West as extensions of a hostile Islamic world, which was now living among and active in the heart of Western civilisation. For both the Islamists and those with growing reasons for anti-Muslim sentiment, there was only one obvious conclusion: Islam was incompatible with modernity and liberal democracy. By the mid-1990s, mutually reinforcing cycles of Islamist-leaning and anti-Muslim feeling entrenched this illusion of the Muslim world and suffocated the diverse voices and political demands of real Muslims across the world.

The genocide of Bosnian Muslims between 1992 and 1995 further stoked the tensions growing between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Various Muslim-majority countries – from Turkey and Pakistan to Iran and Saudi Arabia – attempted to help Bosnians who were subjected to genocide because of their Muslim identities. Having observed thousands rally in Sarajevo in 1994 to wave the flags of Saudi Arabia and Turkey as a show of Muslim solidarity, Samuel Huntington went on to warn in his influential work, *The Clash of Civilizations*, that the West's universalist pretensions increasingly brought it into conflict with other civilisations and, most seriously, with Islam and China. Huntington concluded that "the survival of the West depends on Americans reaffirming their Western identity and Westerners accepting their civilization as unique not universal [and that] avoidance of a global war of civilizations depends on world leaders accepting and cooperating to maintain the multicivilizational character of global politics." [43]

# The First Gulf War and Al-Qaeda's Anti-American Turn

In 1989, bin Laden's primary focus and vision for al-Qaeda after Afghanistan was to establish an armed Islamist movement in South Yemen to overthrow the communist regime there, according to Harmony documents (held and since released by the US Department of Defense). Shortly after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, communism as opposed to the United States became the "Great Satan". With the unification of the two territories into the Republic of Yemen in 1990, Yemeni Islamists adopted a policy of accommodation rather than confrontation, eventually forming a unity government alongside socialists, Ba'athists and Arab nationalists, thereby alienating bin Laden and his core followers. [44] In fact, in his subsequent efforts to consolidate forces in violent opposition to Yemen's unification transition government, bin Laden ended up facing scathing opposition from the country's leading Salafi clerics including, most famously, Sheikh Muqbil bin Hadi al-Wadi'i, who attacked his religious legitimacy through audio cassettes and lectures.

Failing to establish a foothold in Yemen, the al-Qaeda leadership relocated to Sudan and directed its operations towards Somalia. But events unfolding in the wider region – notably the first Gulf war – caused bin Laden to redirect the organisation's focus and confront the United States along with the so-called Zionist-Crusader Alliance. Having offered to provide mujahideen support to the Saudis in the 1990s only to be rebuffed and then to see the United States deploy forces to the kingdom for Operation Desert Storm, bin Laden was propelled to begin clandestine operations against what he viewed as US efforts to dominate the Arabian Peninsula.

> **Case Study: Bin Laden Enters Into an Alliance With the Taliban**
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> In May 1996, Osama bin Laden returned to Afghanistan amid a civil war and after being expelled from Sudan. He settled in Nangarhar, where he was given refuge by old allies from the Afghan-Soviet war. On 23 September 1996, a militant student movement – the Taliban – took control of the Afghan capital Kabul and the Taliban's figurehead, Mullah Mohammad Omar, became self-declared ruler of Afghanistan. Bin Laden was eventually offered protection by the Taliban and by spring 1997, he had entered into an alliance with the Taliban and moved his family to Kandahar, the group's heartland.
>
> Bin Laden had become convinced by then that the Taliban's state project was worthy of support, just as he had supported those in Sudan and Somalia from 1992 to 1996. He offered the Taliban leader money and assistance in rebuilding the country, as well as soldiers. Before he had arrived in Kandahar, bin Laden had declared war on the United States in an article published by London-based Arab newspaper *al-Quds al-Arabi*, followed by numerous interviews. And by 1997, al-Qaeda began

to plan its first international terrorist attacks from Afghanistan – the twin bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.

Shortly after the Taliban capture of Kabul, the United States and Saudi Arabia pressured the Taliban to close all "terrorist training camps" on their territory and to expel bin Laden. For Saudi Arabia, bin Laden was a troublesome political dissident who needed silencing, and for the US, the link between Afghanistan, bin Laden and terrorist attacks against US assets abroad was clear. Over time, the Taliban's insistence on protecting bin Laden became more costly to the regime as his continued provocations resulted in a US strike in 1998 and UN sanctions in 1999.

As part of the first critical break between Saudi religious scholars (who had supported the Afghan jihad) and militant Islamists now represented by al-Qaeda, Saudi clerics issued directives authorising the presence of US and foreign troops on their territory to defend them from Saddam Hussein. Armed Islamists could no longer rely on mainstream Salafist authorities to support their cause. Bin Laden instead turned to the leadership of the Sahwa movement (formed of those exiled Egyptian, Syrian and other Arab Islamists who had sought refuge in Saudi Arabia since the 1960s) for support in denouncing the Saudi regime for its "betrayal" of Islam. His hopes were dashed when the movement's most prominent leaders were arrested. Once freed, they too became vocal critics of al-Qaeda. After the 9/11 attacks, they intensified their condemnation, severely curtailing bin Laden's attempts to unify rebel Muslims around the world.

Bin Laden would go on to become the face of militant Islamism and a "hero" of anti-Americanism in parts of the Muslim world. Behind him stood a vast array of like-minded militants, activists and ideologues who have since expanded the militant network of the global jihadist movement. Up to the mid-1990s, the US had viewed a number of Islamist figures with some degree of favour. Many of these men lived on US soil or were frequently invited over by official and semi-official US organisations in the wake of the US-backed, anti-Soviet, Afghan jihad. Several American and other Western academics and institutions spoke of a "moderate Islamist" in whom they recognised the possibility of the emergence of civil society and the establishment of legitimate Islamist social movements and parties. Indeed, it was only from 1995 onwards that Islamists became steadily synonymous with the prospect of real terror in the eyes of Americans, with this terror now capable of directly harming them. By then, the Islamist forces that had emerged from decades of tumult within the Muslim world had already gained a new momentum – and a common enemy behind which to unite.

# Today – Strength in Sensitivity and Receptiveness to Change

Ahistorical narratives and debates about the Muslim world and the West ignore the social, political and cultural contexts in which these struggles have long been forged. When we consider the Muslim world as a whole today, oppositional Islamist movements still face an unprecedented moral crisis. Their political project – always vague in its promises of a radiant Islamic state applying the sharia – now has a track record that banks on a glorious future but is haunted by failures of the past.

The random violence of the 1990s was still fresh in the memories of Muslim countries when 9/11 occurred. And today the horrors of the ISIS caliphate and the hijacking of the Arab Spring will take generations to overcome. For this reason, the most moderate components within the Islamist movement have vocally professed their faith in democracy more and more in a bid to distance themselves from the militancy that has obscured their political future and objectives. From Indonesia to Morocco, Islamists have participated in elected assemblies where they can. Elected officials like these have set aside the sovereignty of God, or *hakimiyyah*, which both Qutb and Mawdudi erected as the central pillar of an Islamic state. Today, we witness the Taliban in Afghanistan conduct press conferences for the international media, insisting that it seeks peaceful relations with all countries and an inclusive government as a bid to show it has modified its practices to adapt to today's demands.

Islam, like any other religion, is a way of life, one that is given its shape and meaning by the Muslim men and women who identify with it. These men and women belong to a world in which the interconnected media of our contemporary age is threatening the fortress of identity that Islamist ideology has sought to build and protect. During the past century, Islamists have repeatedly sought to impose an interpretation of Islamic history and Muslim identity on contemporary Muslim societies, indicating how they should live and dictating how they should order their political allegiances. Yet this approach has been exhausted – it has reached the end of the road – and no longer are early Islamic social, political, economic or cultural models workable for today's half a billion Muslims under the age of 35. [45] The dramatic and heart-wrenching scenes of ordinary Afghans fleeing their country in desperation at the prospect of Taliban rule once again is a tragic display of evidence for this.

The past will continue to be integral to Islamic heritage and will go on to enrich the identities of those who associate with Islam; whether by faith or culture. But no longer are Muslim societies so easily blinkered when a world of ideas and alternative realities is at their fingertips – in this age of free-flowing knowledge, information, dialogue and exchange. Young Muslims are exploring and sharing new understandings of Islam and demanding the same freedoms as non-Muslims have come to enjoy, and they are not only using but indeed creating many of the mediums the 21st century has to offer. The

divisions of the world according to classical Islamic theorists – those kept alive by modern-day Islamists to justify and mobilise indefinite conflict and hostility with the West – will struggle to survive in an era in which suffering from Islamist-related terrorism and political turmoil is openly shared.

For all the apparent illusion of victories by Islamists worldwide, the Islamist ideology has been consistently incapable of shrinking a contemporary Muslim world to an Islamist mass, swayed exclusively by the imperatives of doctrine. The opportunity today, then, harks back to the very traditions of Muslim civilisation throughout history – a strength to be found in the extreme sensitivity and receptiveness to change. This time, to support and amplify those most progressive in Muslim societies today, the West must understand this struggle and unite on common ground.

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**Footnotes**

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