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Reclaim Political Islam From the Islamists to *Raise Moderate Muslim Voices*

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Contents

Foreword

This is an important paper that seeks to distinguish between extremist interpretations of Islam's relationship to politics and moderate expressions of that same relationship. It encourages a thoroughgoing reinterpretation of fundamental notions of governance, the rule of law and jihad understood as a struggle against social evils, as well as properly authorised defensive action.

It promotes the view that it is the principles and objectives of sharia rather than literal and antiquated applications of it that provide the basis for Muslim participation in civil society and a contribution to the life of a nation. By the same token, as some Muslim scholars are arguing, other religions should also be able to contribute to the social and political sphere. Such commitment, moreover, to seek the common good together should apply whether Muslims are a majority or a minority in a given society. Whatever the dominant religious tradition might be, others should also be free to make their voice heard in the body politic of plural societies. It is only then that mutual belonging will develop.

The report rightly eschews theocracy and clerocracy of every kind. The role of religion instead becomes one of persuasion on the basis of moral and spiritual insight, rather than of coercion and exclusion. There is much here to ponder, debate and develop. I hope it will serve as the catalyst for these as, I am sure, is its intention.

Monsignor Michael Nazir-Ali

01

Executive Summary

Far from being politically static, Muslim-majority countries today (more than 50 globally) reflect an evolving approach to the relationship between religion and state. This means that if the international community wants to support positive change in the Muslim world, it needs to better understand these political nuances.

Religion remains important in many nations, so there must be space for moderate Muslim politics to exist, not only for moral reasons, but also to oppose Islamist extremism.

Since the 1970s, violent expressions of political Islam have impacted the world. These movements have collectively become known as “Islamists”, denoting an extremist, politicised interpretation of Islam grounded in revolutionary ideological zeal. The term “Islamism” is often used interchangeably with “political Islam”. However, since all religions are inherently political, maintaining a valid space for Muslim politics is key to enabling people to bring their deeply held values into this realm – just as believers in other major religions do.

While Islamists claim to entirely represent political Islam, speaking on behalf of all Muslims, they must not be permitted to monopolise the discussion. This is why religious moderates, especially those engaged with politics, must not vacate this space and cede it to the Islamists. This often happens in geopolitical conflict, with militant Islamists influencing Muslims because there are no moderate Muslim voices offering peaceful and conciliatory approaches. Muslims who want to engage with legitimate political issues must have access to a third way that sits between the irreligious and fanatics.

This report proposes moderate Muslim politics as this third way. It exists in practice but needs to be strengthened. One way to achieve this is to underpin it with a compelling analytical framework, presented later in the report.

ISLAMISM IS NOT THE SAME AS POLITICAL ISLAM

While various Muslim leaders have articulated visions of Islam in recent times, from Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf to Jordan's King Abdullah, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, there remains a need for frameworks that better integrate it into the modern world – and answer the popular slogans of Islamists.

How can mainstream Islam reclaim major narratives to enable a tolerant, inclusive representation of Islam and politics in the modern world? This report introduces a rigorous framework that defines the spectrum of political Islam more accurately and distinguishes this term from its most extreme example, Islamism. Our analysis shows that:

- Islam is not unique or exceptional among religions in having political aspects.
- There are many versions of Muslim politics, ranging from confessional Muslim states to Islamic religious nationalism and the most extreme representation – Islamism.
- With several Muslim-majority democracies included within this spectrum, it becomes easier to recognise the compatibility of Islam with democratic principles.

To progress the global debate, this report makes two contributions:

- We define political Islam more precisely, with Islamism identified as an extreme subset. This not only allows for more accurate discussions around both terms but also more precisely sets out the parameters for modern Muslim politics.
- We introduce a framework that not only tracks the evolving dynamics between Islam and politics, but also functions as a new tool with which to predict the future direction that Muslim-majority countries could take.

Islamism is totalitarian, holding that religion should determine everything, overseen by an essentially Leninist concept of leadership, with edicts handed down by a "central committee". The current supreme leaders of Iran and the Taliban in Afghanistan are examples of this. Moderate Muslim politics is the Muslim community offering society guidance, based on the values and ethics of Islam. It seeks influence, not conformity; persuasion, not prescription; to be a voice, respected on its merits, but not the only voice and not enforced by the power of the state.

Our report shows that Islamism is the result of the total *fusion* of religion and politics in which the former *dominates* the latter. While Muslim theology has generally accepted that the Prophet Muhammad's original example in Medina involved a total fusion, whether this can be replicated today is a central question for Muslims. Islamism – as represented today by Khomeinist Iran, the Taliban, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS) – is inherently destructive in believing it can fully recreate the prophetic reality on Earth through violence. Furthermore, this narcissism has led directly to appalling instances of religious extremism resulting in horrific terrorism and violence, sometimes sponsored at state level.

On the other hand, political Islam is more variable, corresponding to either a *partial overlap* or *fusion* of religion and politics – or somewhere in between, with the result being parity of religion and politics or dominance of religion over politics. It is a spectrum, with Islamism an extreme expression. The polar opposite to Islamism is radical republicanism, best represented in the Muslim world by Kemal Ataturk's Turkey or Habib Bourguiba's Tunisia.

REAL-WORLD CASE STUDIES

Case studies, on post-independence Egypt, Pakistan and Tunisia, highlight the dynamism of Muslim politics as practiced today. Using their constitutions as a guide, the same framework is applied to Muslim countries in general to identify that:

- The largest current groupings fit within liberal secularism (18 countries) and religious nationalism (14 countries).

- The liberal-secular countries comprise two types: former French colonies in West Africa and former Soviet states in Central Asia.

- Using the framework's predictive function, we see that if religious forces in liberal-secular Muslim countries become stronger, it is likely these countries will move to a concept known as civil religion; however, if religion declines, those countries are likely to move to radical republicanism.

- In our view, civil religion is the best outcome for countries transitioning to a post-Islamism state while Islamist clerocracy (or theocracy) is the worst.

- The six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries currently fall into the category of religious monarchy, which means they are Muslim nations in which monarchy is the primary source of authority, with Islam as the official state religion.

- While continuing to espouse Islam as a core part of national identity, many of these countries are becoming more religiously plural, with diversity increasingly celebrated.

- Religious nationalism continues to be a force in Muslim democracies, such as Turkey and Pakistan

This report presents an open framework, not a detailed prescription.
The approach is primarily designed to support the foundations of modern societies and oppose Islamist extremists. The latter have declared war on the former, becoming a threat and destabilising force around the world with large-scale, violent terrorist attacks on government institutions as well as civil society since 9/11.

The approach is also designed to cultivate a model of moderate Muslim politics for a post-Islamism world. An exit ramp, if you will. A model of Muslim civil religion that mirrors the United States under former President Barack Obama could be a strong force for a pluralist, civilisational Islam of the future and has the potential to become *a* future flagship of a post-Islamist world.

WHY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY NEEDS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING

What are the implications of this analysis both for the international community and countries of the Muslim world?

Our approach calls for an acceptance of the reality and legitimacy of moderate Muslim politics, while continuing to resist Islamism.

Muslim-majority countries that are liberalising but in which Islamism remains a threat need careful policymaking and support to ensure that social, political and external factors do not push them into the dangerous, adjacent category of Islamist clerocracy, which inevitably means extremist theocracy.

Civil religion is the best scenario in terms of democracy as well as the balance between the religious and the secular. For post-Islamist nations, it represents a potential model on which to settle.

RECOMMENDATIONS: A THIRD WAY

To achieve a third way, the integrity and theological legitimacy of the modern world, including nation states and the international order, must be affirmed. There are four policies that can promote a healthy mixture of religion and politics. Summarised below, they are structured around the four major aspects of Islam currently contested between the extremists and moderates:[1]

- ***Ummah* (nation):** Policymakers must allow Muslim communities to flourish while opposing divisive Islamist notions that pit Muslims against non-Muslims. A strong sense of nationhood is required so modern nation states must assert their values and emphasise they are shared by the major world religions and philosophies, including secular and humanist ones.

- ***Khilafa* (governance):** Policymakers must be clear that khilafa in Islam refers to good governance, with the rule of law and justice tinged with mercy. Attempts to insist on khilafa as a resurrection of medieval and obsolete caliphates or Islamist states must be uncompromisingly resisted.

- ***Sharia* (law and ethics):** Policymakers must be clear that the sharia in Islam refers to ethics. Medieval details of sharia must be modernised by drawing upon centuries of sophisticated jurisprudence and the intrinsic diversity of Muslim interpretations that have included dozens of schools of law. Attempts to insist on a single fundamentalist, literalist, mindless interpretation of sharia must be resisted at all costs.

- ***Jihad* (struggle):** Policymakers must be clear that contemporary Islamic scholars have agreed that jihad in the modern world includes personal and social struggles for good against evil. Even in the military sphere, jihad is a last resort that can only be waged legitimately by conventional armed forces of nation states, another reason why the integrity of the latter is so essential in the battle against Islamist extremism. Modern jihad accepts the Geneva Conventions and other international treaties on warfare.

STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN DENIAL AND ALARMISM

This struggle must be fought and won with the inclusion of Muslim communities worldwide. Closing down the space for debate is counterproductive. Policymakers must strike the right balance between the denials of the Islamists and their apologists within the far-left alliance and the alarmism of the far right. Ironically, both factions equate Islam with Islamism, agreeing the religion is best represented by the type of Islamist extremism pursued by the Khomeinists, the Taliban, al-Qaeda and ISIS. This is partly down to a failure by Muslims to (re)define the parameters of non-extreme Muslim politics.

As a final point, it's worth noting that exclusivist, fundamentalist approaches to politics often result in the rule of clergy or men (clerocracy) who claim to know the mind of God, whereas inclusivist approaches are naturally pluralistic, both religiously and politically. This is why, as Obama once observed, all religions must move towards inclusivist interpretations to

achieve pluralistic coexistence. The theologian Hans Kung has also famously said: “There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions … You have deficiencies in all religions, but you also have truth in all religions.”[2]

This report builds on Kung to demonstrate that such inclusivist interpretations of religion must also be allied with a third way. The dynamic between religion and politics is extremely powerful. It is imperative that a moderate approach is mobilised to defuse the explosive approaches of the militants and extremists.

02

What Is the Legitimate Space for Muslim Politics?

A legitimate space is needed to promote inclusivist, moderate Muslim politics to reclaim the debate from the Islamists. The term "political Islam" is usually a misnomer, often wrongly employed to describe the ideology more accurately defined by the term "Islamism".[3] Islam, like every other major world religion, has an overlap or nexus with politics. The majority of contemporary Muslim-majority countries have an Islam-politics nexus that both represents an unbroken link to the past and is drawn – generally – from moderate, political Islam. Islamism, by contrast, is a minority tendency that represents excessively political Islam or a *fusion* rather than an *overlap* between religion and politics.

Ceding the term political Islam to Islamists is a huge mistake because it enables them to claim they speak for the balance between Islam and politics whereas, in reality, theirs is an extreme position.

Islamism refers to a spectrum of fundamentalist Muslim groups that share a totalitarian, political interpretation of Islam. Guilain Denoeux, a professor of government at Colby College in Maine, provides a concise definition: "A form of instrumentalisation of Islam by individuals, groups and organisations that pursue political objectives. It provides political responses to today's societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundation for which rests on reappropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition."[4] Professor Michael Kenney additionally describes Sunni Islamists as those who "engage in social and political activism to establish Shariah as the basis for organising political and legal authority in the community".[5]

Modern Islamist groups emerged across the Middle East in response to the dominant Arab nationalism of the first half of the 20th century, during which there were fears about the secular direction of the region. Islamist ideology is a particular and extreme political interpretation of Islam – emphasising certain elements of the tradition while downplaying others. Islamism rests on four Quranic notions, read in a very extreme way: ummah (nation), khilafa (caliphate/governance), sharia (law and ethics) and jihad (holy war).

The divisive Islamist reading of ummah pits Muslims against non-Muslims worldwide. Whether militant or political, Sunni Islamists have sought to restore Muslim "dignity" with a return to a so-called caliphate while Shia Islamists seek to achieve a global Shia imamate. Crucially, Islamists uphold the obligation that their narrow and superficial reading of sharia must be the underlying principle of public and state life. Extreme proponents recruit and revolt against regional governments when, in their view, a strict application of sharia law has not been adhered to. Finally, violence in the name of jihad is often adopted by Islamist groups to intimidate and shut down enemies, including those they consider to be preventing the Islamist mission – some at a local or national level, others at a regional or international level, therefore supporting an expansionist Islamist mission. The most extreme examples of Sunni Islamism are represented by al-Qaeda and ISIS while Shia Islamism is personified today by the Islamic Republic in Iran.

While Islamism falls under the sphere of political Islam, it is incorrect to conflate the two because Islam has a diverse and complex role in governments across the Muslim world. That role should not be reduced to Islamism. The trouble is that academics, politicians and policymakers generally use these terms interchangeably. For instance, Olivier Roy, a French professor and political scientist, has said he understands political Islam to be synonymous with Islamism: "I will refer to the contemporary movement that conceives of Islam as a political ideology as 'Islamism'."[6] Graham E Fuller, American analyst and former CIA station chief in Afghanistan, has similarly conflated the two: "I use the terms political Islam or Islamism synonymously … In my view an Islamist is one who believes that Islam as a body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim World and who seeks to implement this idea in some fashion."[7] Fuller's definition is too broad and best describes political Islam rather than the narrower Islamism.

This common misunderstanding makes it clear that delineation between the two is urgently required. Peter Mandaville, senior advisor at the United States Institute of Peace, distinguishes between the terms:

"Islamism refers to a particular kind of Muslim politics – one that seeks to create a political order defined in terms of Islam (usually a shari'ah-based state). Political Islam, while certainly preferable to terms such as Islamic fundamentalism, is less useful for our purposes in two respects. First, in positing "political" as a qualifier for Islam, it ends up reinforcing some of the very boundaries between spheres of thought and practice that we are trying to challenge. To say that we are dealing with an instance of political Islam would be to suggest that there are times when Islam is not political (i.e. that it is sometimes "just" religious).

"The emphasis on Muslim politics rather than "Islamism" is also a more inclusive formulation that allows us to examine political actors who define their motivations and goals, at least in part, as related to Islam, but who do not pursue anything like the establishment of an Islamic political order. In other words, Muslim politics allows us to focus on a broader range of, and the interplay between, actors engaged in all manner and means of Muslim politics whether or not they have as their goal the establishment of an Islamic political order." [8]

Broadly building on Mandaville's definitions, political Islam (or Muslim politics) should be considered an umbrella term that encompasses a broad range of dynamics between religion and politics.

Islamism is a subset of political Islam but at the most extreme end.

To provide greater clarity around this spectrum, this report provides more useful and accurate categorisation through a general framework that has been applied to other religions. This approach also firmly rejects the flawed concept of "Islamic exceptionalism" in political matters that has been promoted by some analysts to make different allowances for Islam in public life.[9] The concept of Islamic exceptionalism has been celebrated by Islamist groups because it has provided support for their extremist world views.

03

Not a Unique Case: The Religion–Politics Dynamic in Non-Muslim Countries

Muslim societies were and are not alone in seeking a balance between religion and politics. This relationship exists in all major world religions and therefore the dynamic between the two occurs in all countries.

CHRISTIANITY: STATE RELIGION AND CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS

Many Christian-majority countries recognise Christianity as their state religion, including the United Kingdom, in the sense that the Church of England is the established church. Through the years, politics has had a profound impact on religion in the country and vice versa. Prior to the 1530s, the English Christian Church, a form of Catholicism, was governed by the pope. However, when Henry VIII broke with the papacy, he radically altered the dynamics between religion and politics. After numerous wars between the supporters of the new Church of England and those who followed the old Catholic religion, the religious rights of non-conformists were recognised by parliament in a turning point in 1689. Since then, Christianity has been considered the UK's official religion.[10]

More recently, when he was chancellor of the exchequer in 2020, Rishi Sunak described the United Kingdom as a "secular country". According to a recent YouGov survey,[11] 55 per cent of Britons do not belong to any particular religion. A third (34 per cent) belong to the Christian faith while other religions comprise 7 per cent of the population (the remaining 4 per cent preferred not to say). Although the UK has gradually been becoming more secular since the end of the Industrial Revolution, Christianity remains the state religion. However, in this time of religious plurality, Christianity no longer defines public concerns or the national identity although it still has an institutionalised presence in politics, for instance, in state-funded faith schools, Christian national holidays and the "Lords Spiritual", the 26 bishops who work in Parliament.

Across Europe, there are Christian Democratic parties who frame their policies through the principles of Christianity. For example, they became major political forces during the Cold War, leading coalition governments in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The movement incorporates traditional church and family values into progressive policies such as social welfare. The Christian faith is ideologically present in their politics as they recognise the need for state intervention to support communities, defend human dignity and safeguard rights to private property while resisting excessive intervention in social life and education. Christian Democratic parties operate separately to the church and, although their supporters are predominantly Christian, they welcome agnostics and atheists. Moreover, their public policies, in response to diminishing faith, have been becoming increasingly secular, favouring pragmatism over Christian principles.

BUDDHISM: NATIONALISM IN SRI LANKA AND MYANMAR

When nation-state building took place during the 19th century, Buddhists began to develop nationalist visions. The nationalism that emerged in South-East Asia's Buddhist-majority nations is an example of both fusion and parity between the religion and politics. Buddhist nationalism has since been identified as a key driver of conflict and tension across countries in the region despite the fact the religion preaches tolerance and pacifism. For instance, many supporters of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka have resorted to ethnocentrism and militarism. This nationalism is widely accepted most likely because the country's largest ethnic group is Sinhalese and the religion most adhered to is Buddhism. The belief that Sri Lanka belongs to the Sinhalese is core to their Buddhist-nationalist ideology – one that justifies their higher status and subjugation of minorities.[12] The rightful ownership of Sri Lanka has been fought over for centuries, most recently resulting in a 26-year-long civil war. Eventually, Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism became a bipartisan force in Parliament, its members promoting laws that disadvantaged minorities such as Tamils and Sri Lankan Muslims while arguably provoking violent responses to minority resistance.[13]

In Myanmar, a Buddhist-nationalist movement gained momentum after the start of political liberalisation in 2011. Prior to this, Buddhist movements had largely been suppressed by the ruling military. Myanmar's Buddhist

nationalism was particularly extreme, endorsing anti-Muslim hate speech and deadly mass violence including the persecution of the Muslim Rohingyas, which has now been classified by the United States as genocide[14]. With Myanmar's return to military control after the 2021 coup, the ensuing restrictions on religious freedom could be detrimental to the Buddhist-nationalist movement. However, there is a symbiotic relationship between the nationalists and military whereby the latter facilitates the goals of the former by fighting the "Muslim threat", while the nationalists promote the religious and cultural justification for their war crimes. Ultimately, with 89 per cent of Myanmar identifying as Buddhist, the religion has been co-opted by the nationalists to hold power over the population.[15]

HINDUISM: INDIAN SECULARISM VERSUS HINDU NATIONALISM

Shortly after independence in 1947, the country's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, championed an Indian secularism that was designed to unify its diverse communities. This secular brand of Indian nationalism defines the country politically with all Indian citizens, regardless of their religion or ethnicity, deemed equal. While Indian secularism championed politics over religion, it did not intend politics and religion to be totally separate. Nehru did not consider secularism to be in opposition to religion: instead, the Indian secularism that he supported honoured all faiths with equal opportunities.[16] In fact, he feared Hindu communalism – an ideology that sought to divide India across religious allegiances and which considers Hinduism supreme. Nehru's fears were confirmed when a man associated with the Hindu nationalist group assassinated Mahatma Gandhi in 1948. In more recent times, since the 1980s, Indian secularism has been struggling. Numerous politicians have capitalised on differences and pandered to religious communities for their support.[17] The weakening of Indian secularism has led to the proliferation of Hindu nationalism.

Hindu nationalists envision India as a majority Hindu country, not a multicultural one. The Hindu nationalist party (BJP), which was formed in 1980, had won the majority of votes in Parliament by the late 1990s. Today, traditional Indian secularism is being challenged by ruling Hindu nationalists.[18]

JUDAISM: RELIGION VERSUS STATE IN ISRAEL

In 1948, Israel became the first independent Jewish state in modern history. David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister, declared: "By virtue of the natural and historic right of the Jewish people and by resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations, we hereby proclaim the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine to be called Israel."[19] Despite this, Israel has no formal constitution, but its declaration of independence includes a commitment to equality for members of all religions. Neither separation nor fusion of religion and politics has been mandated by the Israeli state to date, the issue becoming a point of contention among Jews. In particular, the formation of a Jewish state triggered tensions between civil and Jewish law. Hence, Ben-Gurion shaped a political understanding between secular and religious political parties called the secular-religious status quo. The agreement endeavoured to reassure the international community that Israel would not become a theocracy, while also promising ultra-orthodox citizens the state would not abandon Jewish tradition. Shabbat, family law and ultra-orthodox schools would all be protected under Jewish law: other social matters would be governed by civil law. However, in practice, there were often compromises on which the two would clash. For example, although public transport stopped running during Shabbat, private citizens would be free to drive their own cars.[20]

Over the years, Israeli Jews have become increasingly secular. This development has led to significant erosion of the "status quo" agreement. Tensions between state and religion in Israel are most likely to manifest around particular issues: the Israeli-Palestinian borders, women's rights and the legitimacy of Jewish courts.[21] The impact of globalisation and subsequent influence of Western norms and laws have meant that the Jewish state of Israel has been experiencing an identity crisis. Israel's Jewish population is diverse, with the highly religious and secular holding opposite outlooks on the dynamics between religion and politics – leading to countless debates on how leaders should approach this relationship.

WHAT TYPE OF GLOBAL RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE DO WE WANT?

The dynamics between religion and politics apply equally to Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism.

The Vatican is an example of a Christian theocracy in a small city-state that has vast influence because there are more than a billion Roman Catholics in the world.[22] To say the Vatican should not have any influence in countries with sizeable Roman-Catholic communities would be absurd. Similarly odd would be to say that Israel should not have influence over Jews around the world, given it is the nation state of the Jewish people and every Jew has the right to Israeli citizenship. To say that India should have no influence on Hindus worldwide would also be illogical. Similarly, saying that Saudi Arabia, where the king has the official title of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, should not have any influence on Muslims beyond its borders, would be incongruous. Equally, it would make no sense to say that Iran and Iraq, countries that contain the holiest sites and highest authorities of Shia Islam, should have no influence on Shia Muslims around the world.

The question we should focus on is: **what kind of influence should these religious centres exert?** The reality is that these countries hold an immense sway over religious populations worldwide. But to what extent is it exclusive or inclusive, divisive or unifying, narrow-minded and sectarian or universal and ecumenical? In our The State of Debate Within Islam report, Saudi Arabia was used as an example of a country that has transitioned from exporting a narrow interpretation of Wahhabism and Islamism to a much more inclusive and universalist interpretation of Islam.

THE CRUX OF THE MATTER IS THE TYPE OF POLITICISATION

In 2011, former UK Prime Minister David Cameron said: "We are a Christian country and we should not be afraid to say so."[23] His comments led to a national debate on the topic with the Archbishop of Canterbury at the time, Rowan Williams, declaring in 2014 that Britain was post-Christian.[24]

Williams' successor, Justin Welby, hit the national headlines in 2022 when he declared that the UK government's deal to send some asylum seekers and refugees to Rwanda was "against the judgment of God".[25] This too sparked a national debate and controversy. Welby was making a political statement based on his Christian faith, but his comments also raised a basic theological question: who decides what the judgement of God is? Who can know the command of God?[26] This has also echoed the debates around the

misuse of the Quranic verse, “Judgement belongs only to God”, by violent extremists from the era of the Kharijite rebels until the present day: al-Qaeda, ISIS, the Taliban and the ayatollahs of Iran have all claimed they alone know the command of God, based on their understanding of the Quran.

Welby’s intervention is a legitimate example of politicised faith. The same is true of modern papal influence as well as the increasingly global and ecumenical work of the Amman Message, Al-Azhar University, Muslim World League and Marrakesh Declaration. This is a central message: politics is intertwined with Islam, just as with every other major world religion. So political Islam is not itself a problem, just as the pope’s political Christianity, Zionism’s political Judaism and India’s political Hinduism are not problems in themselves. The problem is the *type* of politicisation of religion.

RELIGION AND POST-SECULARISM

In a post-secular era, the presence of religion in our modern pluralist societies forces us to rethink its relationship with the public sphere, an argument summarised by the political philosopher Spyridon Kaltsas. Secularism is related to state neutrality and may involve a legal-constitutional separation of church and state: while one of its main purposes is to create a common space for the protection of rights and freedom of citizens, secularism transforms into a world view and slips into ideology when it attempts to determine what religion truly is and influences state neutrality through the exclusion of religion from the public sphere.

Today, religion is returning to the public sphere. This may be termed “post-secularism”. The political interest in post-secularism lies in reform – an improvement based on a critical rethink of the normative exclusion of religion from the public sphere.[27] In other words, the challenge of pluralism to modern Western societies requires a rethink of secularism. Post-secularism allows for rational and modern citizens to be inspired by a comprehensive value system, such as religion, in their day-to-day politics.

04

Assessing the Dynamics Between Religion and Politics in the Muslim World

Authored by Philip Gorski, professor of sociology at Yale University, there is an analytical framework on religion-politics dynamics that has been applied to non-Muslim states, mainly the United States.[28] By distinguishing between dominance of religion, dominance of politics and parity between the two on the vertical axis, and a possible separation, overlap or fusion of the two on the horizontal, Gorski reveals the nuances of the relationship between religion and politics. His matrix is based on nine types of dynamic. This includes radical republicanism in which politics dominates religion while being totally separate from it. Meanwhile, at the other end of this spectrum is clerocracy under which religion dominates politics but where the two spheres are totally fused – like Tibet under the leadership of the Dalai Lamas.

While Gorski has not given examples from the Muslim world, this report applies his model to Muslim-majority countries for the first time.

FIGURE 1

The relationship between religion and politics in Muslim-majority countries

RELIGION/POLITICS RELATIONSHIP		OVERLAP		
		SEPARATION	PARTIAL OVERLAP	FUSION
DOMINANCE	POLITICS DOMINATES RELIGION	**Radical republicanism (for example, French laïcité)** Turkey under the leadership of Kemal Ataturk Tunisia under the leadership of Habib Bourguiba	**Confessional state (for example, medieval papacy)** Egypt from 1971 to 2022, except during Mohamed Morsi's leadership Pakistan at various times in its history Afghanistan during the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021 Tunisia after 2014	**Political religion (for example, 20th-century totalitarianism)** Nazism and fascism Albania under communist rule from 1946 to 1991 Afghanistan under Soviet rule from 1979 to 1989 Iraq under the Ba'ath Party from 1968 to 2003 Syria under the Ba'ath Party from 1963 to present day
	PARITY (RELIGION AND POLITICS ARE EQUALLY POWERFUL)	**Liberal secularism (for example, the early philosophy of John Rawls)** Former French colonies in West Africa such as Mali, Mauritania and Senegal Former Soviet states in Central Asia	**Civil religion (for example, the US under the leadership of Barack Obama)** Pakistan under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah Tunisia from 2011 to 2014	**Religious nationalism** Pakistan under the leadership of Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq and Imran Khan Turkey under the leadership of Recep Erdoğan
	RELIGION DOMINATES POLITICS	**Radical sectarianism (for example, fundamentalist Mormonism)** Nigeria (divided between the Muslim-majority north and Christian-majority south)	**Religious monarchy** Countries and monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council	**Islamist clerocracy** Islamic Republic of Iran from 1979 to present day Afghanistan under the Taliban from 1996 to 2001 and 2021 to present day ISIS, in power from 2014 to 2019

Source: TBI (Framework based on Philip Gorski's model but applied to Muslim-majority countries for the first time)

WHEN RELIGION AND POLITICS ARE COMPLETELY SEPARATE

The first column includes countries in which:

- politics dominates religion, resulting in radical republicanism
- there is parity between politics and religion, resulting in liberal secularism
- religion dominates politics, resulting in radical sectarianism

Radical republicanism is exemplified in the Muslim world by Ataturk's Turkey and Bourguiba's Tunisia, the latter strongly influenced by its former colonial power, France. Liberal secularism is exemplified by the former French colonies in West Africa and former Soviet states in Central Asia. Radical sectarianism is partially represented by the case of Nigeria where sharia is applied in the Muslim-majority north but not in the Christian-majority south. These entries show that separation of religion and the state is a relatively new idea in the Muslim world, given the great Islamic empires always needed religious legitimacy and their rulers had close relations with the clergy. In recent decades, many non-Islamist Muslim leaders have also felt the need to legitimise themselves through religion. Although the Muslim world has largely been located in a religious age, it could now be moving towards a post-religious one, in a similar direction to Western Europe.

Intrinsic, institutional secularism in the Muslim world is rare, given the continuing importance of the Islamic faith and how embedded Islamic institutions are, especially in education and social welfare: it is no coincidence that Muslim liberal-secular states were French and Soviet colonies – until recently. The embedded nature of Islam in Muslim-majority countries contrasts with most other regions of the world, which are secularising. Ireland, one of the more religious European countries, is now a post-Catholic state after the widely supported secular constitution of 1973 and the gradual reduction of religious influence that has followed. There are signs of secularisation in the Middle East, as shown in polling and analysis by the Tony Blair Institute. The people of the Middle East are increasingly supportive of the separation of religion and politics and are rejecting absolutist Islamic governments while opposing the interference of religious leaders in politics.[29]

THE PARTIAL OVERLAP BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS

The middle column includes countries in which:

- politics dominates religion, resulting in a confessional state
- there is parity between politics and religion, resulting in civil religion
- religion dominates politics, resulting in the religious-monarchy model

It should come as no surprise that most Muslim-majority countries fall into the middle column, representing a partial overlap between religion and politics. This is characteristic of Islamic history: the norm since the seventh-century Umayyad Empire has not been clerocracies but rather religious and political leaders trading power and influence in a scenario reflective of moderate political Islam. Unsurprisingly, this natural institutional arrangement is not what Islamist extremists support.

The Umayyads and subsequent major Islamic empires, including the Abbasids and Ottomans, represent an unbroken link from the time of the prophet's followers until the modern era. When politics has dominated religion, the result is Muslim confessional states, that is largely secular countries with Islam as the state religion.

Lebanon is a confessional state in which the constitution provides for political parties representing different religious communities. Islam is not recognised as the state religion and Lebanon is implicitly secular[30] but the confessional model distributes power proportionately between subgroups, namely Maronite Christians and Shia and Sunni Muslims. After Lebanon's independence from France in 1943, it was agreed that representatives of these religious communities would be allocated high-level political positions in the government. This means the president has to be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim and the speaker of parliament a Shia Muslim. However, political sectarianism has deepened divisions between religious communities in the country. Prior to a visit from the French President Emmanuel Macron in 2020, Lebanon's president at the time Michel Aoun called for the proclamation of a secular state,[31] which is a popular demand among Lebanon's youth.

Meanwhile, parity between religion and politics leads to the tradition of civil religion that also exists in the United States and has most recently been exemplified by former President Obama. It is arguable that examples of Islamic civil religion existed throughout medieval times: modern examples include Muhammad Ali Jinnah's vision for Pakistan[32] and Tunisia between 2011 and 2019.

When religion dominates politics, the result is the religious-monarchy model of Islamic monarchies, as represented by Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. In addition to power largely centred around monarchies and clergy, all these countries also have elected parliaments or consultative assemblies (*majlis al-shura*) for the public to input into the political system.

WHEN RELIGION AND POLITICS COMPLETELY FUSE

The third column includes countries in which:

- politics dominates religion, resulting in political religion
- there is parity between politics and religion, resulting in Islamic religious nationalism
- religion dominates politics, resulting in clerocracy

The third column produces the lowest levels of liberty and freedom. When politics dominates in a total fusion, this leads to totalitarian ideologies such as Ba'athism. Much like 20th-century communism, Nazism and fascism, the Ba'athist states of Iraq and Syria used mass repression and horrific violence to uphold their systems. The Ba'athist ideology combines secular Arab nationalism with Eastern-bloc-style socialism although it does not consider religion to be incompatible with the state. In fact, Islam is intertwined with the secular and Arab-nationalist policies of Ba'athism. Ba'athist Iraq was not an Islamist state, but it was extremely repressive.

When there is a fusion in which religion has an equal or dominant influence compared to politics, this leads to Islamic religious nationalism strongly inspired by Islamism – such as Zia's Pakistan or Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Turkey – and outright clerocracy, such as Iran under the ayatollahs or Afghanistan under the Taliban.

ISLAMISM'S NARCISSISTIC DREAM OF REPLICATING THE MEDINA

The contemporary theologian Sheikh Abdallah bin Bayyah has described the Prophet Muhammad's Medina as having "a complete fusion of religion and state, in the sense that the system of the state was based on scriptural texts, accompanied by infallible authority delegated from the divine and represented in the person of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace".[33] He goes on to describe how the twin roles of political and religious leadership separated slowly after the prophet's time: "However, after the Prophetic era, authority was transferred to the rightly guided caliphs who were people of knowledge. They experienced authority without enjoying divine delegation … the link between the political leader and the jurist (religious leader) became disconnected, although the jurist did not become entirely absent from the instruments of the state since he fulfilled the roles of judge and mufti. In the modern era, legislation remains derived from the spirit and texts of the Sharia. The sources of influence of those in authority affect how they rule. Here, we hold that every Muslim-majority state is thus a Muslim or Islamic one."[34]

One of the basic errors of modern Islamist movements is to narcissistically imagine that they, and they alone, can recreate the prophet's utopia – despite the overwhelming evidence of history showing the contrary. An example is Ayatollah Khomeini's repeated descriptions of his own Islamist regime in Iran as a system of divine government (*nizam-e-hukm-e-ilahi*).

05

The Framework in Action in the Muslim World

The dynamics of national politics means that countries slowly evolve from one category to another under different governments, as these country case studies illustrate.

EGYPT

The most populous Arab country, Egypt exerts a huge cultural influence on the Muslim world. Home to Al-Azhar University, one of the oldest Islamic universities in the world, regarded as a theological authority by Sunni Muslims, it is equally the birthplace of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose offshoots include Hamas and jihadi terrorist groups.

- The country's 1971 constitution was largely secular but declared Islam to be the state religion,[35] creating a confessional state during the leadership of Anwar Sadat. In common with other Arab Muslim countries, Egypt has for a long time had a Ministry for Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs – the latter covering mosques, Islamic schools and seminaries as well as personal and family law relating to the largely Muslim population. The related institutions of Al-Azhar and the Grand Mufti's Office have provided religious authority, not only in Egypt but throughout the Sunni Muslim world.

- A 1980 amendment to the 1971 constitution, which declared the sharia as the source of all legislation,[36] was the result of pressure exerted by Islamist groups, shifting Egypt towards religious nationalism.

- After the fall of Hosni Mubarak, triggered by the Arab Spring in 2011, Mohamed Morsi became the first democratically elected president of the modern Egyptian republic. Ironically, he was a pure Islamist from the Muslim Brotherhood. His attempts to transform Egypt into an Islamist republic backfired, resulting in a coup that was led by the Egyptian military, Al-Azhar and the Coptic Church – all of whom he had failed to win over in his quest to pursue the slogan, "Islam is the solution".

- The 2014 constitution approved by President Sisi after the removal of Morsi made a subtle but important change in wording: it mentions the principles of sharia as the primary source of legislation, not the sharia itself.[37] This is significant because the principles refer to the ethos of sharia, therefore representing a shift from the legalistic interpretations often favoured by Islamists towards dynamic ethical interpretations that are more likely to evolve. This philosophical change is significant because it can be considered part of a shift that orientates countries towards an "exit ramp" from Islamism to a post-Islamism world.[38]

Sisi, like Mubarak, Sadat and Nasser before him, is known to be pious and wants to promote Islam as a positive influence in Egyptian society without permitting a clerocracy: he has even said there is no such thing as a religious state, therefore challenging a central Islamist concept.[39] He has called on senior clerics to lead a "religious revolution" and renew related discourse in a way that is applicable to the modern world.[40]

FIGURE 2

The changing dynamics between religion and politics in Egypt since 1971

Source: TBI

PAKISTAN

One of the most populous Muslim-majority countries in the world, Pakistan is the adopted home of the Jamaat-e-Islami movement. The country is also home to the Muslim world's only nuclear power. Since the founding of Pakistan in 1947, the relationship between religion and state has vacillated under different political leadership:[41]

- Muslim modernism is a 19th-century idea that sprang from British India before partition, exemplified by Aligarh, the country's leading Muslim university. Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the respective philosophical and political founders of Pakistan, subscribed to this approach, which was later continued by leaders such as Ayub Khan. In a nutshell, it can be described as embracing all the positive aspects of modernity, including science and technology, democracy and national self-determination, while remaining faithful to the positive principles of Islam.

  Jinnah's famous speech at the inception of Pakistan exemplifies Muslim modernism in relation to religion and the state: "You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the State … We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State … Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State."

- The Islamic socialism of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto during the 1970s. Jamaat-e-Islami's founder Mawlana Mawdudi critiqued this idea by saying that Islam was inherently committed to social justice, so part of the phrase was redundant. However, many other Islamist leaders did not apply the same critique to terms such as "Islamic democracy", which they themselves used. Their defence was that Bhutto's socialism in the 1970s was a cover for godless, atheist communism that could not be

Islamised. On the opposite side, the Islamic socialists argued that Muslim communism,[42] rooted in some of the strictly egalitarian, social and economic teachings of the prophet, was important.

- In the 1980s, the Islamism of General Zia-ul-Haq. A fundamentalist interpretation of Islam that involved specific political projects, including support of military jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet invasion, Zia's policies also included educational aspects. One such example was the Hijra Council's translations of medieval Islamic texts on mathematics, science and technology into English. His cultural Islamisation resulted in many restrictions being applied to the once-thriving Pakistani arts scene.

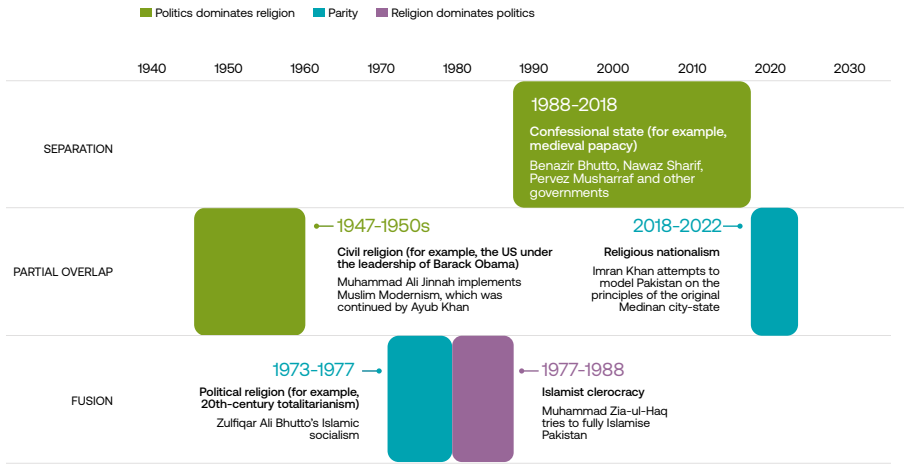
- The "enlightened moderation" of General Pervez Musharraf during the 2000s. Attempting to reverse some of Zia's influence, Musharraf was largely preoccupied by the US-led "war on terror" in which Pakistan was both a willing and unwilling ally after 9/11. Musharraf brought in Javed Ghamidi, a traditional scholar with a strong rationalist outlook, who was later forced into self-imposed exile as a result of security threats from Taliban-style militias in Pakistan.

- Most recently, a return to Muslim modernism or Islamic nationalism: General Raheel Sharif, an influential army leader, favoured Muslim modernism. However, the former Prime Minister Imran Khan, who was ousted from parliament in 2022, seemed to be caught between this approach and Islamic nationalism. He was certainly influenced by Turkey's President Erdogan, as illustrated by his support for an Urdu translation of a Turkish religious-nationalist television series for broadcast in Pakistan.[43] After his election in 2018, Khan championed his interpretation of the Prophet Muhammad's Medinan state as a model for a socially just, welfare-state-based Pakistan. Since then, the country has changed tack again towards a confessional state based on Muslim modernism.

It should be noted that seemingly trivial details often mask huge controversies. For example, the word “Islamic” in the country’s official name was dropped for some years but later restored after a tense national debate about the implications of this term for religion and state relationships. Today, the country’s full name is the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

FIGURE 3

The changing dynamics between religion and politics in Pakistan since 1947



Source: TBI

TUNISIA

Tunisia is a relatively small country, with a population of approximately 12 million. However, it is religiously homogeneous, with 99 per cent of the population identifying as Sunni Muslim. While the country’s size means it only contains about 0.5 per cent of the world’s two billion Muslims, its homogeneity makes it an interesting case study for what a modern Muslim-majority state could look like. Indeed, since independence, Tunisia has experienced a prolonged struggle between Islamist, secular and modernist forces over the nature of Islam-politics interactions.

- After leading the struggle for independence from France, which was achieved in 1956, President Bourguiba immediately introduced radical reforms to Tunisian society, inspired by his rationalist (rather than traditionalist) understanding of sharia and his appreciation of the positive values of the French republic. According to an authoritative account of Bourguiba's reforms: "The role of Islam in Tunisian identity was recognised, although the workings of government were to be exclusively secular. Women's rights were recognised in the 1956 Code of Personal Status, an extraordinarily radical document for its time that, among other things, banned polygamy, gave women virtual legal equality with men, enabled women to initiate divorce, introduced a legal minimum age for marriage, and gave women the right to be educated. Education was extended throughout the country, and the curriculum was modernised to reduce religious influence."[44]

  The above reforms were opposed constantly by Islamist groups, the largest of which was the Muslim Brotherhood-linked Ennahda. Islamist opposition to Bourguiba was based mainly on their understanding of sharia, which led them to oppose man-made laws and propose literalist, fundamentalist readings that would reverse all the gains in women's rights listed above. After Bourguiba's crackdown on Ennahda in the 1980s, its founder Rached Ghannouchi went into exile in the United Kingdom. Here, his thinking developed into what might be termed a type of post-Islamism, including an acceptance of democracy, which led to one academic describing him as "a democrat within Islamism".[45]

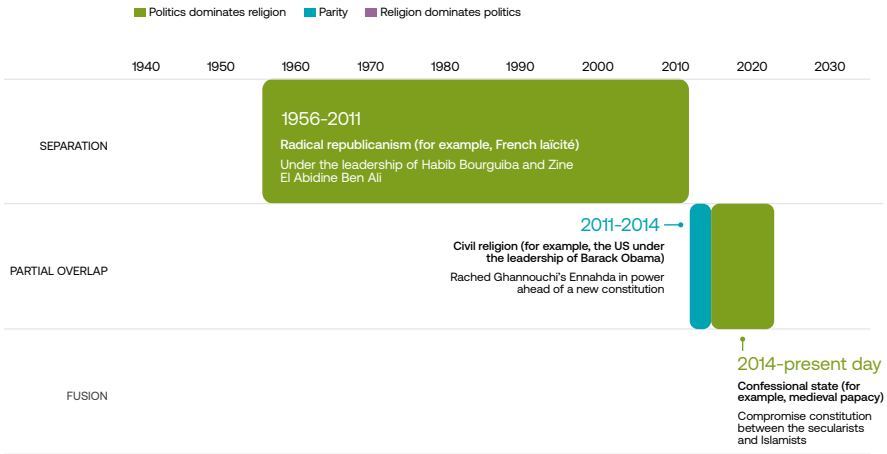
- After the fall of Ben Ali's government in 2011, Ghannouchi returned to Tunisia and his Ennahda Party won the most seats in the parliamentary election of that year. The new 2014 constitution, a compromise between Islamists and secularists, included the proviso that Islam was the state religion but there were no references to sharia as the source of legislation. This was in keeping with Ghannouchi's post-Islamist emphasis on the underlying values rather than the formal laws of sharia.[46]

- In 2016, Ghannouchi announced that Ennahda was separating its political activities from religion: they were no longer Islamists but Muslim Democrats, much like Christian Democrats in Germany.[47]

- Since then, the 2022 constitution has reversed some of the additions championed by Islamist parties, leading to a more secular constitution.[48]

FIGURE 4

The changing dynamics between religion and politics in Tunisia since 1956



Source: TBI

ORGANISATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION COUNTRIES

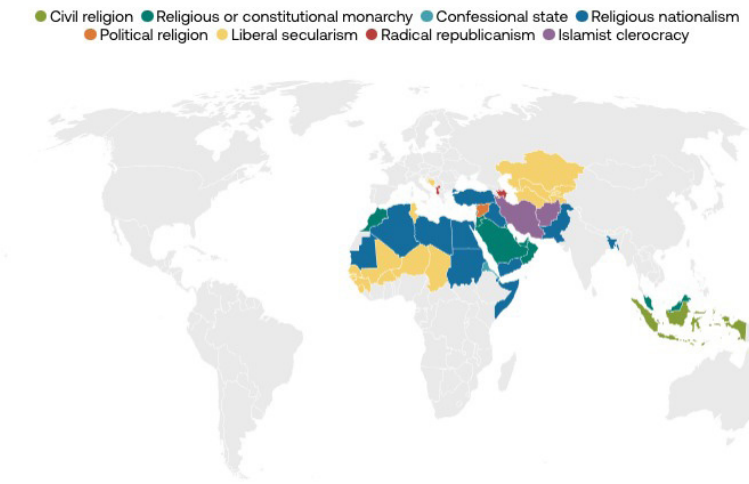
The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries, which has 57 member states located primarily in North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, attempts to be a collective voice for the Muslim world. The second largest inter-governmental body of its kind in the world after the United Nations, it endeavours to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony.

FIGURE 5

Mapping the changing dynamics in present-day OIC countries

RELIGION/POLITICS RELATIONSHIP		OVERLAP		
		SEPARATION	PARTIAL OVERLAP	FUSION
DOMINANCE	POLITICS DOMINATES RELIGION	Radical republicanism (for example, French laïcité) Albania Azerbaijan * Kosovo	Confessional state (for example, medieval papacy) Eritrea * Lebanon	Political religion (for example, 20th-century totalitarianism) Syria *
	PARITY (RELIGION AND POLITICS ARE EQUALLY POWERFUL)	Liberal secularism (for example, the early philosophy of John Rawls) Bosnia-Herzegovina Burkina Faso * Chad * Gambia * Guinea Guinea-Bissau Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan Mali * Niger * Nigeria Senegal Sierra Leone Tajikistan Turkmenistan Tunisia Uzbekistan	Civil religion (for example, the US under the leadership of Barack Obama) Indonesia *	Religious nationalism Algeria Bangladesh * Comoros * Djibouti * Egypt Iraq Libya Maldives Mauritania Pakistan under the leadership of Imran Khan Turkey under the leadership of Recep Erdoğan Somalia Sudan Yemen
	RELIGION DOMINATES POLITICS	Radical sectarianism (for example, Fundamentalism (Mormonism) Nigeria *	Religious or constitutional monarchy Bahrain Brunei Jordan Kuwait Malaysia Morocco Oman Qatar Saudi Arabia United Arab Emirates	Islamist clerocracy Afghanistan under the Taliban from 2021 to present day Islamic Republic of Iran from 1979 to present day

Source TBI: (Note: * While our classifications are based on the official constitutions of each state and our assessment of their religious-political realities, they are initial attempts. Results may vary from one analyst to another, but the method used is the central point. Nigeria is included twice to cover the divisions between the north and south of the country.)



Source: TBI

Using the framework brings to light the following trends on groupings of OIC countries:

- The former communist countries of Albania, Azerbaijan and Kosovo fall into the category of radical republicanism.

- Both former French colonies in West Africa and former Soviet states in Central Asia can be classified in the liberal-secularism category. The constitutions of the former are unsurprisingly very French in their secularism while the latter groups' secular constitutions have a communist influence. However, the strong degree of religious practice in their populations means that religion and politics are on a par.

As an example of how this framework can be used as a new predictive tool, it is possible to see that if the religious forces in these countries result in more overlap than separation with politics, they could move over to the category of civil religion. However, if religion declines, the same nations could move over to radical republicanism.

- The GCC countries fall into the category of religious monarchy: that is, overwhelmingly Muslim nations with monarchy as the primary source of authority.

Both the religious-monarchy model and religious nationalism are one category away from Islamist clerocracy (the worst-case scenario, in our view) and civil religion (the best outcome, in our view). These countries are critical. Abolishing the GCC monarchies through republican movements could lead to either the preferred civil religion or the worst option of Islamist clerocracy, as the predictive power of the tool shows. Similarly, with the development of religious nationalism in maturing Muslim democracies such as Turkey and Pakistan, the outcome for these critical countries could also be Islamist clerocracy or civil religion.

It could be argued that civil religion is the best scenario in terms of democracy as well as the balance between the religious and the secular. Additionally, for post-Islamist nations, it represents a potential model on which to settle. However, the main concern is to avoid Islamist clerocracy because this inevitably means extremist theocracy. Hence, the religious-monarchy models and religious nationalism scenarios are much better than clerocracy – although they are always at risk of being subverted into the latter.

06

Conclusion: Paving the Way to a Healthy Relationship

By distinguishing between Muslim politics and Islamism, this report has shown that:

- Islam is not unique or exceptional among religions in having political aspects.
- There are many versions of Muslim politics, ranging from confessional Muslim states to Islamic religious nationalism and the most extreme representation – Islamism.
- Confessional states include present-day Egypt while the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is an example of a country with strong Islamic nationalism. The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan under the Taliban are primary instances of Islamism, as are non-state groups ranging from the Muslim Brotherhood to al-Qaeda and ISIS.
- The compatibility of Islam and democratic principles is easy to recognise through this framework because several Muslim-majority democracies are represented within the spectrum of Muslim politics.

A complete and organic separation of religion and politics is rare in the Muslim world. The exceptions are Ataturk's Turkey and Bourguiba's Tunisia, the latter having been strongly influenced by France. This type of separation is more common when it has been imposed by colonial powers, as evident from countries with liberal-secular constitutions, including former French colonies in West Africa and former Soviet states in Central Asia.

Many Muslim-majority countries fall into the category of partial overlap between religion and politics, which is characteristic of nation states and empires during much of Islamic history. When politics dominates religion in this category, the result is confessional states or largely secular countries in which Islam is the state religion. When religion dominates politics in this category, the result is the Islamic religious-monarchy model.

But parity between religion and politics leads to the tradition of civil religion that also exists in the United States and has most recently been exemplified by the presidency of Obama. Examples of Islamic civil religion have existed throughout medieval times but more contemporary instances include Jinnah's vision for Pakistan and Tunisia following the Arab Spring.

The fusion of politics and religion, with the former dominating the latter, leads to totalitarian ideologies such as Ba'athism. Much like instances of 20th-century communism, Nazism and fascism, the Ba'athist states of Iraq and Syria employed mass repression and horrific violence to uphold their systems. When the fusion involves parity between the two, the outcome is religious nationalism as seen in Zia's Pakistan and Erdogan's Turkey. When the fusion involves a completely dominant role for religion, the product is clerocracy or the rule of the clergy, exemplified by present-day Iran or Afghanistan.

Moderate Muslim politics has been the norm throughout Islamic history. A model of Muslim civil religion mirroring that of the United States under Obama could be a strong force for a pluralist, civilisational Islam and has the potential to become the future flagship of a post-Islamist world. As always, the main concern remains to avoid Islamist clerocracy because this inevitably means extremist theocracy.

To pave the way to a healthy relationship between religion and politics, the integrity and theological legitimacy of the modern world, including nation states and the international order, must be affirmed. There are four policies that can promote a healthy mixture of religion and politics. Summarised below, they are structured around the four major aspects of Islam currently contested between the extremists and moderates:[49]

- **Ummah (nation):** Policymakers must allow Muslim communities to flourish while opposing divisive Islamist notions that pit Muslims against non-Muslims. A strong sense of nationhood is required so modern nation states must assert their values and emphasise they are shared by the major world religions and philosophies, including secular and humanist ones.

- **Khilafa (governance):** Policymakers must be clear that khilafa in Islam refers to good governance, with the rule of law and justice tinged with mercy. Attempts to insist on khilafa as a resurrection of medieval and obsolete caliphates or Islamist states must be uncompromisingly resisted.

- **Sharia (law and ethics):** Policymakers must be clear that sharia in Islam refers to ethics. Medieval details of sharia must be modernised by drawing upon centuries of sophisticated jurisprudence and the intrinsic diversity of Muslim interpretations that included dozens of schools of law, even during the medieval period. Attempts to insist on a single fundamentalist, literalist, mindless interpretation of sharia must be resisted at all costs.

- **Jihad (struggle):** Policymakers must be clear that contemporary Islamic scholars have agreed that jihad in the modern world includes personal and social struggles for good against evil. Even in the military sphere, jihad is a last resort that can only be waged legitimately by armed forces of nation states, another reason why the integrity of the latter is so essential in the battle against Islamist extremism. Modern jihad accepts the Geneva Conventions and other international treaties on warfare.

THE CONTESTED BATTLE FOR ISLAM

This struggle must be fought and won with the inclusion of Muslim communities worldwide. Closing down space for debate is counterproductive. Policymakers must strike the right balance between the denials of the Islamists and their apologists within the far-left alliance and the alarmism of the far right. Ironically, both factions equate Islam with Islamism, agreeing the religion is best represented by the type of Islamist extremism pursued by the Khomeinists, the Taliban, al-Qaeda and ISIS. This is partly down to a failure by Muslims to (re)define the parameters of non-extreme Muslim politics.

Such extremism must be vigorously challenged at the level of ideas.
A compelling case for balance and moderation in the dynamic between politics and religion around the world, including in Muslim-majority countries, must be made.

In other words, we must reclaim religious politics from extremism: if moderate religious voices do not engage with political matters, the ground will be ceded to extremists, who will then monopolise this space. This often happens in geopolitical conflict because there is an absence of moderate Muslim voices offering peaceful and conciliatory alternative approaches. Those Muslims who wish to engage with legitimate political issues must have recourse to a third way between the irreligious and the fanatics. Moderate political Islam or Muslim politics is this third way. It exists in practice but needs to be strengthened. The framework included in this report does exactly that to support the ground for moderate Muslim politics – and raise moderate Muslim voices.

07

Annex: Questions at the Heart of the Dynamic Between Islam and Politics

To comprehend contemporary politics within Muslim-majority countries, it is useful to understand the reasons for the dominance of political quietism – the reluctance of Muslims to question or oppose their leaders – in Sunni and Shia Islam. And second to acknowledge the revolutionary mindsets that have been adopted in response. The suppression of a legitimate space for moderate Muslim politics has led to a vacuum filled by Islamist revolutionaries. This has been a mistake and needs to be reversed.

There has always been a tension within Islam between monarchy and republicanism, political liberty and authoritarianism. These battles have their roots in the early days of Islam, especially during the civil wars that followed the death of the Prophet Muhammad. The conflicts have also been reflected within the *hadith* literature – a source of Islamic law, based on the traditions and sayings of the prophet – parts of which were clearly fabricated to support theological and political positions by invoking authority for them. These conflicting hadiths gave rise to a subsequent struggle over their validity, authenticity and interpretation.

THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S MISSION

The Prophet Muhammad was the grandson of Abdul Muttalib, a leader of the ruling tribe of Mecca, called the Quraysh. According to Islamic tradition, he received his mission and the first revelation of Quranic verses from God via the Angel Gabriel around 610CE. His mission lasted 23 years until his death, with further revelations later compiled into the written Quran.

Mecca housed the cube-shaped temple or "House of God (*Allah*)" said to have been built by Abraham and Ishmael, the traditional ancestors of the Arabs and cousins of the Israelite Jews. But Mecca had become a centre of pagan polytheism, with 360 idols placed around the temple by every major Arabian clan. The annual pilgrimage or hajj saw people converging

on Mecca from all over Arabia, with the associated trade making the destination an economic powerhouse and religious centre. The Quraysh were custodians of the temple and hosts of the hajj.

The prophet's mission was divided into two main phases. First, the 13-year Meccan phase between 610CE and 623CE, consisting of peaceful but revolutionary preaching on monotheism – radical in a polytheistic society – and social justice, which included economic fairness, the liberation of slaves and improving women's rights. His mission was met with resistance and violent persecution, attracting a few but devout followers, mostly from the Quraysh. Many of his followers were slaves. The prophet also enjoyed some political protection through his family ties although a handful of his followers were killed, including Islam's first martyr, who was female. The non-violent Quranic ethos was "Withhold your hands",[50] analogous to the Christian principle of turning the other cheek.

Second, the ten-year Medinan phase saw the prophet establish his Islamic city-state in Medina after his message was accepted by the two major tribes there. They were of Yemeni origin and allied with more than a dozen Jewish tribes. This city-state included a treaty of mutual defence with nine Jewish tribes, known as the Medina Charter, which has since inspired the contemporary Marrakesh Declaration (2016) on the rights of non-Muslims in Muslim-majority countries.[51] Before his death, he wrestled control of Mecca from his base in Medina and exported Abrahamic monotheism around Arabia: soon, most of the peninsula's people had embraced Islam.

AFTER THE PROPHET: SHIA SPIRITUAL-ROYALISM VERSUS SUNNI REPUBLICANISM

After the prophet's death, Muslims eventually divided into two major camps: Sunni and Shia. Today, the split is 80 to 85 per cent Sunni versus 10 to 15 per cent Shia.[52]

In Shia Islam, it was believed the prophet's son-in-law Ali, followed by Ali's sons Hasan and Husain and their descendants, had a divine right to rule Muslims as imams or spiritual-political leaders. But with a divinely appointed dynasty, there was always the danger of the succession being disputed. The majority of

Shias today follow the Twelver school that outwardly ended in 874CE with the death of the eleventh imam, Hasan Askari. This school held that Askari's son, Muhammad, had passed into "occultation" and was to return towards the end of time as the twelfth imam and a messiah known as the *Mahdi*. This messianic impulse is also common to Judaism, Christianity and Sunni Islam, with the various prophecies influencing one another. Just as contemporary Jewish messianic schools include pro- and anti-Zionist views, Mahdist theologies within Islam are contested. Contemporary Twelver Shias retain Mahdism as a major principle, whether the Khomeinists in Iran, Hizbullah or non-Islamist ayatollahs.[53] Sunni Islam has a softer belief in the Mahdi, but one that has led to dozens of messianic movements. One of the most notable has been in Sudan, where an Islamic state was established between 1885 and 1898, fighting against British forces, killing General Charles Gordon in Khartoum in 1885. The Mahdi of Sudan's family is still revered there: his great-grandson Sadiq al-Mahdi served twice as prime minister between 1966 and 1989. Also, more recently, a notable Sunni messianic movement led to the temporary seizure of the Great Mosque in Mecca by proto-al-Qaeda rebels in 1979.[54]

Other Shia schools endorsed different lineages, most notably the Ismailis whose global head, His Highness the Aga Khan, carries a conferment of royalty from the British throne and is revered as the latest in an unbroken chain of imams since Ali. Meanwhile, the Zaydi sect of Shia Islam has classically been the closest to the Sunni camp by believing in Shia imamate in principle, but pragmatically accepting a Sunni caliphate in practice. The most prominent Zaydi group today is the Houthis of Yemen, whose leader studied in Iran and has fallen into the orbit of the Khomeinists. Not surprisingly, this has been the cause of the recent conflict, which started in 2015 and continues today, between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. The latter is the historical home of Wahhabi-Salafism, one of the most conservative interpretations of Sunni Islam that tends to be very anti-Shia. The conflict has continued despite Saudi Arabia steadily moving away from its Wahhabi roots in recent years.

Sunni Islam, by contrast, believed the leader of the Muslims should be a *caliph* (a successor) who was not divinely appointed via the prophet's descendants, but elected by the community through the traditional practice

of an oath of allegiance. The prophet's direct descendants, revered by the Shia, represented one wing of his Quraysh tribe, but in practice the first three political rulers were the Sunni caliphs Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, all of whom were from the same tribe and were effectively cousins and in-laws of the prophet's household. Shia Islam later charged that these caliphs conspiratorially deprived Ali of his rightful inheritance as first leader of the Muslims. Even Sunni texts contain indications that Ali believed he was the rightful first leader. After these three caliphs, the caliphate passed to Ali who was therefore the fourth caliph of Sunni Islam and the first imam of Shia Islam.

Although Sunni Islam has always revered the prophet's household, its tendencies were republican as opposed to the spiritual-royalism of the Shias. According to the Sunnis, the first four caliphs gained that position in different ways: Abu Bakr by choice of the prophet, Umar as Abu Bakr's appointee, Uthman elected from a shortlist of six candidates left by the dying Umar and Ali elected unopposed, since there was no rival candidate with his spiritual credentials. During the election of Uthman, the casting vote was delivered by Ibn Awf who knocked on every door in Medina to ascertain the people's wishes – this could be seen as a simple precursor to the modern ballot box. Notably, after Abu Bakr, the next three caliphs all met violent deaths: Umar was assassinated by a Persian slave; Uthman was assassinated by other Muslims, including a son of Abu Bakr; and Ali was assassinated by fanatical Kharijite rebels.

During Ali's reign, his leadership was challenged by Muawiya, who later became the first caliph of the Umayyads, another branch of the Quraysh. After Ali agreed to mediation, the Kharijite rebels assassinated him, arguing that he had blasphemed by accepting human arbitration over divine providence: they believed that Ali should not have compromised, holding fast to his divinely appointed mission. After Ali, his eldest son Hasan ruled briefly for six months but then abdicated in favour of Muawiya. Many Shias accuse Muawiya of having Hasan poisoned to death.

MARTYRDOM AT KARBALA: THE COMPLEX REACTIONS OF SUNNI, SHIA AND SUFI ISLAM

Muawiya appointed his son Yazid as caliph in a move considered an unprecedented, monarchy-like step. It was a step too far for Husain, the third imam of Shia Islam. Husain led a campaign against Yazid to nip what he considered a despotic ruler in the bud. However, his campaign was not well-organised: Husain and his small band of supporters were slaughtered at Karbala.

The Muslim reaction to Karbala has been divided: Shias and much of Sufi Islam regarded Husain as a great martyr, his cause as totally just. The Sunni response was complex: while revering Husain as a martyr, Yazid was still technically considered a legitimate caliph if his argument of being validly appointed by his father, and confirmed by large parts of the public, was accepted. Other senior followers, who had warned Husain against taking on the military might of the Umayyads, had taken a neutral stance.

Whichever stance was taken, however, the ramifications of the murder of the prophet's grandson were to be felt around the Muslim world until the present day.

AFTER KARBALA: UMAYYADS AND ABBASIDS CHALLENGED BY REVOLUTIONARIES

The powerful story of Karbala went on to be re-enacted several times. The people of Medina launched their own uprising in solidarity with the events of Karbala, but the Umayyad army also crushed their revolt. Abdullah bin Zubair, another senior follower of the prophet, then rebelled against Umayyad rule in Mecca, declaring himself caliph. He too was crushed by the Umayyads: Mecca and Medina had now joined Karbala as locations for the murder of the pious.

Even after the Abbasids, another branch of the Quraysh, replaced the Umayyads as caliphs, the revolutionary fervour continued, including among those who made claims to being the messianic Mahdi. The Abbasids were

as ruthless as the Umayyads in stamping out rebellion. One of the Abbasid caliphs even took the clever step of giving his son and future caliph the title of Mahdi to pre-empt any further claimants to rebellious messianism.

QUIETIST ISLAM: A RESPONSE TO THE EARLY CIVIL WARS

Sunni Imams Abu Hanifa and Malik ibn Anas, whose complementary approaches to Islamic jurisprudence have defined it ever since, developed evolving responses to these political events: both are said to have sympathised with or even supported pious rebels against the ruling powers. Abu Hanifa is said to have distrusted "political hadiths", many of which teach unconditional loyalty to the ruler, no matter how tyrannical. Malik ibn Anas, as the imam of Medinan scholarship, is said to have supported some of the rebels, but took pragmatic learnings from their devastating defeats. He eventually concluded that rebellion was worse than the status quo because it resulted in civil war and the killing of believers. "A thousand years of tyranny is preferable to a day of anarchy," as Malik ibn Anas put it. Indeed, at least two of the Abbasid caliphs of the time studied hadiths directly with Malik ibn Anas. (Sunni Islam developed about a dozen schools of law and jurisprudence, the most prominent amongst them being the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali.)

The Maliki, and later Hanbali, jurists were especially opposed to Shia Islam, having developed under Sunni caliphates. They feared the revolutionary fervour inspired by Husain would lead to regular massacres of people led by pious but politically naïve leaders. Thus, Sunni jurists adopted the principle that there was now a legally binding consensus to obey the de facto ruler (political quietism), with opposition limited to private counsel rather than public defiance.

POLITICAL QUIETISM VERSUS REVOLUTION IN RECENT TIMES

Political quietism is obviously a problem for would-be Sunni revolutionaries against Muslim governments. The influence of this widely adopted Sunni position could be seen until recent times but then, in the 1990s, the Islamic Salvation Front of Algeria (FIS) waged war on the military government after the latter cancelled democratic elections the FIS was set to win. To justify

its campaign, one of FIS's founders, Ali Belhadj, penned a lengthy treatise arguing that the matter of rebelling against unjust rulers had always been disputed within Sunni Islam – and there had never been a true consensus against it.

In any case, must Muslims always be caught between the ultra-Sunni quietism and ensuing ultra-Shia revolutionary fervour? Between never-ending cycles of forever-rulers followed by violent revolutions? Arguably, a transition to democracy, supported by civil society, would be much better, with dictators in Muslim countries being encouraged to give up power and share it with their citizens.

It is worth noting that the sectarian events of the seventh century still have an inordinate impact on politics within Muslim countries. A good example is the career of the Iraqi politician and former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. As a contemporary observer has noted: "When Maliki dabbled in sectarian rhetoric in 2010–2014, which included reducing Iraq's problems to an extension of a seventh-century sectarian civil war, the accepted narrative in Washington and London's policy circles was that Sunnis, no longer in power, are the main problem. Maliki's sectarianism was justified as targeting the growing jihadist presence in western Iraq. His new comments show him as a sectarian politician who continues to 'other' Sunnis whether there is a jihadist threat or not."[55]

DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE MUSLIM WORLD SINCE THE 19TH CENTURY

The Muslim world watched the US and French revolutions of the late 18th century closely. Ottoman scholarship began including discussions of liberty, equality and fraternity while the "Young Turk" revolution of 1908 promised a new citizenry based on these three liberal, democratic principles.[56] The Second Constitutional Period of the Ottoman Empire lasted between 1908 and 1920.[57] A constitutional monarchy, was announced in Syria in 1920: Sheikh Rashid Rida, a leading Islamic thinker at the time, supervised the drafting of a constitution that established the first modern Arab democracy and guaranteed equal rights for all citizens, including non-Muslims. This fledgling democracy was crushed by British and French colonial powers.[58]

After the second world war and the emergence of independent, Muslim-majority countries, many of the latter became democracies or fledgling democracies. Examples include Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan and Turkey.

Notably, the above are all from the Sunni world. In Shia Islam, Twelver theology precluded the masses from becoming involved in politics because only the long-awaited Mahdi could lead a true Shia political movement. But by the beginning of the 20th century, Shia discourse began to include ideas around *velayat-e-ummat* (guardianship of the people): the people could rule in the absence of the Mahdi until the latter's return. Later, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was to make a more specific doctrine, *velayat-e-faqih* (guardianship of the jurist-theologian), the basis of Iran's theocracy since 1979. This allowed the theologian-jurists, personified by the ayatollahs and other clerics, to take charge of Shia politics and rule until the Mahdi's return.[59] The example of Iran shows why there must be space for legitimate Muslim politics: the "guardianship of the people" might well have expressed itself in democratic forms had it not been suppressed by the theocratic "guardianship of the jurist-theologian".

RESPONSES TO WESTERN MODERNITY SINCE THE 19TH CENTURY

Given the military, economic, cultural and political threat to Islam from the imperialist expansion of Christian Europe, it is unsurprising that a range of responses to Western modernity arose from the Muslim world. Islamism was just one of the responses, but others have been as diverse as Islamic modernism and secular authoritarianism. For example, Islamic modernists during the 19th and 20th centuries were concerned with establishing constitutions that were consistent with Islamic principles.[60]

Of course, Islamism does not just represent religious extremism, it involves political extremism too, as illustrated by the opening passage of *Milestones*, written by the influential ideologue Sayyid Qutb: "Humanity stands today at the brink of an abyss … because of its bankruptcy in the world of values … This is especially clear in the Western world, which has no values to give to humanity … There must now be new leadership for humanity! … Leadership that can endow humanity with new, serious and perfect values … Islam alone possesses those values and that method … The time has come for Islam and the *Ummah* to play their roles."[61]

The historical developments outlined above explain why the encounter between the Islamic world and modernity has resulted in a variety of dynamics between religion and the state, particularly in the post-colonial, independent nation states created in the 20th century. And it is this very complexity that undermines the monopolistic Islamist claims about the relationship between religion and state that is personified by the famous slogan, “Islam is the solution”.

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