Political Islam in the Middle East

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CMI Reports

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Foreword

This report provides an overview of the phenomenon known as "political Islam" in the Middle East. The term "Middle East" is used here in a restricted sense with a special emphasis on the Levant (Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria). The report may be read in conjunction with the CMI reports on political Islam in South Asia (Knudsen 2002a) and the annotated bibliography on Palestinian Islamist movements (Bangstad 2002).

The report is principally a desk-study, but I have also benefited from informal discussions and interviews with scholars working on the subject (Appendix I). They should not be held responsible for the views expressed here which, along with any mistakes, are solely my own.

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Executive summary

This report provides an introduction to selected aspects of the phenomenon commonly referred to as "political Islam". The report gives special emphasis to the Middle East, in particular the Levantine countries, and outlines two aspects of the Islamist movement that may be considered polar opposites: democracy and political violence. In the third section the report reviews some of the main theories used to explain the Islamic resurgence in the Middle East (Figure 1). In brief, the report shows that Islam need not be incompatible with democracy and that there is a tendency to neglect the fact that many Middle Eastern countries have been engaged in a brutal suppression of Islamist movements, causing them, some argue, to take up arms against the state, and more rarely, foreign countries. The use of political violence is widespread in the Middle East, but is neither illogical nor irrational. In many cases even Islamist groups known for their use of violence have been transformed into peaceful political parties successfully contesting municipal and national elections. Nonetheless, the Islamist revival in the Middle East remains in part unexplained despite a number of theories seeking to account for its growth and popular appeal. In general, most theories hold that Islamism is a reaction to relative deprivation, especially social inequality and political oppression. Alternative theories seek the answer to the Islamist revival within the confines of religion itself and the powerful, evocative potential of religious symbolism.

The conclusion argues in favour of moving beyond the "gloom and doom" approach that portrays Islamism as an illegitimate political expression and a potential threat to the West ("Old Islamism"), and of a more nuanced understanding of the current democratisation of the Islamist movement that is now taking place throughout the Middle East ("New Islamism"). This importance of understanding the ideological roots of the "New Islamism" is foregrounded along with the need for thorough first-hand knowledge of Islamist movements and their adherents. As social movements, its is argued that more emphasis needs to be placed on understanding the ways in which they have been capable of harnessing the aspirations not only of the poorer sections of society but also of the middle class.
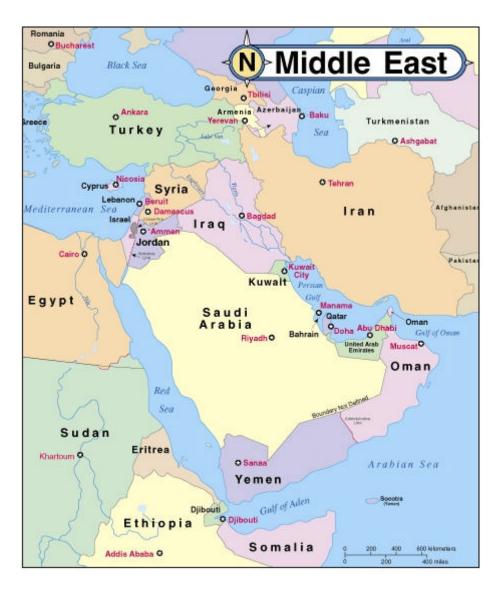
Figure 1: The Middle East

1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present an overview of issues central to understanding the current growth of political Islam in the Middle East: what is now commonly referred to as an Islamic *revival* or Islamic *resurgence*. The complexity of the issue, as well as the vastness of the region under study, means that this report cannot do justice to the many studies dealing with this subject nor embrace fully the regional diversity with respect to these issues. Instead, there is an emphasis on some key subjects that are central to a better understanding as well as some of the theories used to explain this growth. In particular this report examines the prospects for democracy and the use of extreme violence.

The resurgence of Islam, now commonly referred to as "political Islam", is generally attributed to the crushing military defeats of Arabic countries suffered at the hands of Israeli forces in 1967 (Milton-Edwards 2000: p. 123). This defeat marked the end of pan-Arabism and the start of an Islamic revival that grew to challenge nation-states in the Middle East. In order to discover the ideological roots of this revival, we must go back in time to the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Egypt. The MB was founded in 1928 by the charismatic Hassan al-Banna (b. 1906) and had within a few years become a significant religious and political force (Eickelman 1998).[1] The reason for the movement's rapid ascendance and popular appeal can be found in its appeal to Islam as a complete system that offered an alternative to the westernisation, secularisation and materialism that now threatened Muslim societies. To counter these negative influences, al-Banna advocated a return to the roots of religion, in particular the period referred to as the Golden Age of Islam during the reign of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (632–1258) (Milton-Edwards 2000: p. 129). The principal aims of al-Banna and the MB was initially not political but religious and to spread the faith the organisation formed an expanding number of religious, welfare and educational institutions and facilities. This laid the foundation of a large network that sustained the MB through difficult years of brutal suppression by successive regimes that robbed it of its leaders, through the assassination of al-Banna (1949) and imprisonment of its members. Despite Nasser's brutal crackdown on the movement in the 1950s it had grown to become a classless, populist movement that drew members from all walks of life, although its core membership was the urban middle class. The movement's appeal also extended beyond Egypt and led to the formation of offshoots in countries such as Jordan, Syria and Palestine (Shadid 1988). Although internal cohesion has always been a hallmark of the Brotherhood (the members had to swear complete allegiance to the movement) the crackdown radicalised the movement as did the loss of Palestine and the spread of pan-Arabism. This paved the way for Sayyid Qutb, who

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[1] Details of the Muslim Brotherhood falls beyond the scope of this study, but see Lia (1996).

became the movement's new chief ideologist. While Banna and his moderate successor Hassan al-Hudaibi had promoted a gradualist agenda that sought to reform and ultimately purify society through educating the public, Qutb advanced a more proactive agenda that aimed to overthrow un-Islamic governments and rulers in order to resurrect the force of Islam (Milton-Edwards 2000: p. 131). Qutb's revolutionary agenda made him a threat to the Egyptian regime and he was consequently imprisoned for more than a decade (1954–66) until his execution in 1966. While in prison, Qutb produced a number of influential works, most notably his book *Signposts* (*Ma'alim fi al-tariq*), a commentary on the Quran that was released from prison in 1965 and is considered one of the most important radical Muslim texts (Eickelman 1998: p. 292). In this book Qutb introduced the distinction between *al-nizam al-jahili* (a decadent or ignorant order) and *al-nizam al-Islami* (Islamic order) and argued that ending the former and promoting the latter was only possible through a "holy war" (see JIHAD). Where Hassan al-Banna had argued for a gradual change within society (an *evolutionary* approach), Sayyid Qutb sought the overthrow of power in order to establish an Islamic state (a *revolutionary* approach). By the end of the 1960s, political developments in the Middle East – military defeats, economic decline and social unrest – set the stage for an Islamic revival that was based on the Qutbian politicisation of religion, now commonly referred to as political Islam.

Political Islam

The problem of understanding "political" Islam begins already at the level of definition: what *is* political Islam and hence how can it best be "defined"? Because of this problem, many authors dispense with a definition altogether, leaving it to the reader to infer the many meanings of political Islam. This is also reflected in the common practice of "prefixing" Islam to create a bewildering conceptual plurality, which, to name but a few, includes; *radical* Islam, *militant* Islam, *extremist* Islam, *revolutionary* Islam and *fundamentalist* Islam. This diversity points both to the many aspects believed to characterise political Islam, as well as to the problem of finding an appropriate term.

The shortest (and most encompassing) definition of political Islam is that it denotes "Islam used to a political end". A general problem with the term political Islam is that it tends to imply "an illegitimate extension of the Islamic tradition outside of the properly religious domain it has historically occupied" (Hirschkind 1997: p. 12). Another problem with the term political Islam is that Islam fuses religion and politics (*din wa dawla*), which is not captured by the term political Islam. A final point is that there is a tendency to condemn all forms of social protest as illegitimate and conflating legitimate protest and the use of militancy and violence (ibid.).

As Kari Karamé (1996) points out, because of the many shortcomings of the term political Islam there is increasing resort to the term "Islamism" (and Islamists), which also conforms to the common Arabic reference to the Islamic movement (*al-harak al-Islamiyya*) and its adherents as Islamists (*Islamiyyun*). There is hence a shift from a more abstract approach to one that considers the broader goals of the Islamist movement and the Islamist awakening (*al-sahwa al-Islamiyya*). A wide range of movements may fall within this general category but according to Bjørn Olav Utvik (1993: p. 201) the Islamist movement can be delimited by the three following traits. First of all they refer to themselves as the Islamic movement, secondly they call for an Islamic state ruled in accordance with Sharia and finally they organise themselves for the purpose of achieving these goals.

A defining feature of Islamists is that they embrace the concept *ijtehad*, that is, independent reasoning and reinterpretation of the Quran and Islamic traditions and the need to reinterpret the Holy Scriptures and apply them to today's world. In this sense Islamism is a modernist project, although as Utvik (1993) has noted, Islamists tend to embrace *modernity* (technological advances, industrialism etc) but reject *modernism* and its concomitant strong belief in science and reason. As Khan (2001) shows, the Islamist "project" is premised on three interrelated forms of critique: of modernity, of the west and of the state. More importantly, the current Islamist movement finds that although Islam is a "complete system" it is not a ready-made blueprint for a modern Islamic society. Thus they have adopted a *reconstitutive* dimension based on reinterpreting the sacred texts (*ijtehad*) and a *programmatic* dimension that seeks to translate key Islamic concepts into practical policy. There is, Khan argues, a general move towards more democratic means among those he labels "second-generation Islamists". Example of this democratic shift can be found among the Islamist parties (Turkey's Welfare Party) and political-cum-religious leaders (Iran's president Muhammad Khatemi).[2] In general, the democratic transformation of political Islam, by some termed the "New Islamism" (Langohr 2001: p. 593), is still inadequately understood and as yet little studied (see CONCLUSION). Views are divided as to whether this is caused by an ideological shift, or whether the lessons of the past decade have taught them that overthrowing secular governments is impossible and that this approach has weakened the movements and robbed them of their leaders.

This also ties in with the important question of whether political Islam is now a spent force or capable of continued growth. The charismatic period of political Islam can be placed around 1970–82 and the high point of the period was the revolution in Iran (1977–78) with Ayatollah Khomeini as the charismatic and messianic leader. As Sami Zubaida has argued, the Islamic movements have since their heyday in the 1970s become routinised

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[2] For a more detailed discussion of Islam and ideology, see Shepard (1987).

and integrated into regular politics (Zubaida 2000). When the charismatic period came to an end, political Islam was gradually stripped of its political stamp to be replaced by conservative moralism. It was this transformation that prompted Olivier Roy's claim to *The Failure of Political Islam* (1994). A similar argument has been advanced by Gilles Kepel (2002), who claims that the Islamist movement went through a first phase of expansion (c. 1966–89) that was followed by a decade of decline (1990–present). It may be invoked against Kepel's analysis that he applies a very narrow definition of what may be considered proof of Islamism succeeding, namely that the Islamists have been brought to power through popular vote or by force. It seems that this criterion may prevent us from seeing the many ways in which political Islam manifests itself in the contemporary world. In an attempt to clarify the ideological basis of Islamic movements, Sami Zubaida (2000) has suggested a tripartite typology that includes *conservative*, *radical* and *political Islam*. Zubaida argues that conservative Islam primarily seeks moral and social control of its citizens. The foremost representative of this type is the Gulf States, in particular Saudi Arabia. The second type is best exemplified by the Egyptian Islamic groups building on the ideology of Sayyid Qutb that seek to overthrow unjust rulers. The third type, political Islam, differs from the two others by seeking to reform society and politics and representing a continuity with nationalist and leftist agendas.

In a twist on the old Orientalist debate (Said 1978), Sabet (2000: p. 897) argues that much of the scholarly work on political Islam is written within the confines of Western social theory and has to obey what he terms its "discursive parameters". As an example of this problem Sabet includes the tendency to fix the label "fundamentalist" to any regime that seeks to apply the Sharia in accordance with Islam. The implication is that religion should be separated from politics as in Western participatory democracy. The implied assumption is that fundamentalism's (or political Islam's) unitary approach to religion *and* state (*din wa dawla*) is suspect and opposed to Islam simply as a moral system separated from the state (*din wa dunya*). This argument is sometimes extended to the bigoted conclusion that there are "good Muslims" and "bad Muslims" (Mamdani 2002), something that may account for the current rise in what Halliday (1999) has termed "anti-Muslimism" in the West.

Jihad

An understanding of the concept of jihad is vital to understanding the ideological legitimisation of political Islam. The concept has a complex and contested history (evident in Quran and the Hadith), which reflects that it was interpreted according to changing socio-political circumstances (Euben 2002: p. 21). This made the true meaning of the term ambiguous. Nonetheless, there is a tendency to reify jihad, making it synonymous with armed struggle ("holy war"). This has caused it to become perhaps the most used (and

abused) term in the political Islam vocabulary (see, Knudsen 2002a: p. 12). Thus, the term is now often used as a conventional shorthand not only for the Islamic revival in the Middle East (considered a "jihadist backlash"), but also for the alleged threat this represents to Western democracies in Islam's quest for world hegemony ("global jihad"). While the notion of a "global jihad" can easily be discounted, a more difficult question is whether the Islamist movement is premised on an armed ("jehadist") struggle against opponents and enemies.

The importance of jihad to the Islamist movement can be traced to the radical ideas of Sayyid Qutb and the radicalisation of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1960s (see INTRODUCTION). The revolutionary ideology of Sayyid Qutb tied the concept to the struggle to overcome *jahiliyya*, a Quranic term which refers to the pre-Islamic condition combining ignorance and savagery.[3] Qutb and the Islamists following in his footsteps argued that current Muslim societies had reverted to *jahiliyya* (Roy 1994: p. 41), a social condition (rather than an epoch or period) that must be defeated through a jihad in order to re-establish divine rule (*hakimiyya*). The importance of this becomes evident when considering that by redefining jihad from a defensive war against foreign unbelievers to an internal quest deposing un-Islamic governments and tyrants, Qutb had redefined jihad from an external fight against Islam's enemies to an internal quest for control of the state. As Khan (2001: p. 221) points out, this gave the Islamists a "powerful moral weapon: the modern jihad, the just rebellion". This explains two features of Islamism: although anti-Western it is not primarily concerned with attacking the West. Rather, anti-Western sentiments are to a large degree channelled towards the autocratic regimes in the Middle East and also explain why they have made efforts to stamp out, co-opt or accommodate the Islamist movements (see, Moustafa 2000, Zeghal 1999, on Egypt). In general, any study of the growth of political Islam needs to consider the role of the state. Two aspects of the Middle East states stand out: first, the prevalence of autocratic regimes which has spurred the growth of political Islam; and second, the failure of secularism and pan-Arab nationalism which has caused an Islamist backlash (see THEORIES).

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[3] It is worth noting that *jahilyyia* implies that members of society were no longer considered Muslims but termed *takfir* (impious). Excommunicated, they could legitimately be killed (Kepel 2002: p. 31).

2. Democracy

The relationship between Islam and democracy is a complex one. Especially, there is disagreement over whether the Islamist movement is committed to democracy or inherently illiberal and undemocratic. As Vicky Langohr (2001: p. 591) notes, those who are sceptical about the possibility of a democratic Islamism generally advance one of two arguments. The first is procedural: that although some Islamists have seemingly opted to effect change through the ballot box, they have chosen this method only because they do not yet have the power to use more forceful ones. The second argument is that Islamists seek to impose Sharia, but considering that Sharia itself is discriminatory (against women, non-Muslims etc.) it follows that Islamists will seek to impose undemocratic policies.[4]

The failure of liberal democracy in most of the Arab world has been attributed to Islam's inadequate conception of *individual rights* (Moaddel 2002b). One the one hand it is argued that the lack of individual rights causes a lack of legislative functions that in turn explains the dearth of legislative institutions. This, in the final instance, explains why there is no need for any principle of (public) participation. The second explanation links this to the Islamic view of *personhood* where, it is argued, Islam is based on a positive view of the person who only needs proper guidance (By contrast Christianity is based on the concept of man as an evil sinner who must be controlled.) In classical Islamic political theory, such guidance is provided by the rightful caliph. After he is installed, following him is a Muslim duty (ibid.: p. 365). However, against this view it might be argued that there is another side to Islamic political theory which stresses the duty to depose a tyrannical leader as well as contains the conceptual elements of democracy (ibid.). They include the consultative assemblies or bodies (*shura*), consensus (*ijma*) and utility (*masliha*). The problem, as Moaddel sees it, is not the lack of democratic theory, but the lack of *procedural rules* in Islam that could be used to determine when installing or rebelling against a ruler is justified and when consensus can be used to settle a disputed matter of jurisprudence (ibid.).

In general, there is considerable scepticism as to whether Islamists are committed to democracy. The historian Elie Kedouri has even claimed that "democracy is alien to the mind-set of Islam" (cited in, Anderson 2001). The same goes for the question of popular vote, where some claim that Islamists only believe in "one man, one vote, one time" (Langohr 2001: 591). However, there are many examples that prove the opposite, in particular the recent Turkish Welfare party experience and leading Islamists claiming that Islamisation is best achieved through democratisation (Khan 2001: p. 223).

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[4] A detailed discussion of Sharia and the state in the Modern Middle east can be found in, (Brown 1997).

Most of the Middle Eastern states are run by autocratic regimes bent on keeping Islamists from gaining power, both through denying them a popular vote and by brutal suppression of their leaders and followers. To many analysts, it is exactly the prevalence of autocracy in the Middle East that has given rise to Islamist movements, which are seen as a way of expressing popular sentiment against illegitimate rulers. The countries in the Middle East have pursued different strategies vis-à-vis the Islamist threat. They have either tried their best to suppress them periodically as in Egypt (Alterman 2000) or permanently (as in many Gulf states) or tried to prevent them from gaining power through participation in the popular vote. As Vicky Langohr (2001: p. 592) notes, "what is actually on offer to most Islamist movements, as well as other opposition movements, is participation in electoral contests for political office within regimes that remain highly authoritarian".

Still, the reasons for embracing democratic elections among Islamist movements vary from country to country. Islamic organisations such as the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria and the Welfare Party (Refah or RP) in Turkey all "accept a pluralist political system and an electoral path to power" (Al Sayyid 2002: p. 178).[5] While these organisations have always sought political power using peaceful methods, only rarely are Islamist organisations transformed from violent to non-violent ones. An especially interesting case in this regard is the gradual pacification of the Lebanese Hizbollah, long a leading (Shia) Islamist group that became infamous for its violent guerrilla tactics that included the abduction of Western hostages, suicide missions and bomb attacks against foreign missions, most notably the attacks on the US embassy (63 persons killed) and US Marine barracks (241 killed) in Beirut in 1983 (see POLITICAL VIOLENCE). As Anthony Shadid (2002) explains it, one of the reasons for Hizbollah's renunciation of political violence is a pragmatic concern with the high costs associated with the use of violence and, as developed over many years, that more could be achieved through the ballot box. Following the peace accord in 1989 (Ta'if Agreement) that ended 15 years of civil war (1975–90), Hizbollah participated in two consecutive parliamentary elections (1992 and 1996) and won eight and seven seats respectively out of 128 parliamentary seats. Although this was a mere symbolic representation in the Lebanese parliament, Hizbollah remained committed to Lebanon's consociational democracy. Hizbollah in particular had developed a large network of social services that in many instances eclipsed those of the Lebanese state (Langohr 2001: p. 597). This provides the organisation with a solid platform that it can rely on in municipal elections. As Nizar Hamzeh (2000) shows in his detailed article on the municipal elections in Lebanon in 1998, Hizbollah succeeded in winning the majority of Lebanon's municipalities either through "party lists" made up of its

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[5] For details on political Islam in Turkey and the role of the Welfare Party, see (Önis 2001).

own candidates or through the formation of "coalition lists" in a strategic alliance with independent candidates, secular and confessional parties (Sunni, Christian) as well as influential families (ibid.: p. 745ff). Overall, the main reason for Hizbollah's stunning victory was its commitment to grassroots work and providing social welfare services to reduce poverty. The organisation runs three hospitals and more than 17 medical centres in addition to a large commercial network consisting of shopping malls, petrol stations and construction companies (ibid.: p. 743). Partly for this reason, Hizbollah is able to command a large section of the popular vote in local elections. Hezbollah's election victory is also the result of having developed a professional campaign committee with a large salaried staff and hundreds of volunteers that ran pre-election trials and transported voters to the voting stations. A final reason for Hizbollah's political dominance is that in the rural areas of Lebanon the central government remains weak, thus allowing Hizbollah to take over state functions, including the settlement of conflicts and meting out punishment (Hamzeh 1994). Taken together, these elements are important reasons for the scale of Hizbollah's electoral victory in municipal elections. It is important to keep in mind, though, that despite the "gradualist-pragmatic formula" that Hizbollah has adopted (ibid.: p. 741), the organisation remains firmly committed to creating an Islamic state in Lebanon (Langohr 2001: p. 598).[6] This is especially poignant since Lebanon is still struggling to overcome years of civil war that have caused political instability (Haddad 2002), economic turmoil (Norton 1999) and lingering tensions between the country's multiple confessional identities (Barak 2002, Johnson 2001).

The pragmatism of Lebanon's Hizbollah becomes even more interesting when compared with another Islamist group infamous for its use of extreme violence, namely the Palestinian Hamas (see POLITICAL VIOLENCE). Like Hizbollah, Hamas is a key provider of social welfare in the Palestinian Occupied Territories and protecting this welfare network is so important that the organisation tailors its violent tactics to prevent a backlash from the Israeli forces or the Palestinian Authority aimed at destroying or disrupting the welfare system itself (Mishal and Sela 2000). Likewise, Hamas' covert participation in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections in 1996 was a calculated decision aimed at avoiding conferring credibility on the Oslo Accords (and the Declaration of Principles, DOP) while at the same time securing a future role in the subsequent municipal elections. A classified Hamas document from 1992 shows that the organisation initially considered four possible options: participation, boycott, boycott as well as undermine and disrupt elections, and participation under a name other than Hamas (Mishal and Sela 2000: p. 124). During the coming years the Hamas leadership softened its initial decision to boycott the elections and ask its supporters to refrain from casting their vote, to one of "refraining

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[6] For a more detailed account of Hizbollah's transition from violent Islamic movement to political party, see Saad-Ghorayeb (2002).

from participation" in the 1996 elections to the Palestinian Authority Council. At the same time, the organisation tacitly encouraged its members to run as independents and for the rank-and-file to vote for these candidates as well as Fatah candidates known for their good relations with the Islamic opposition. Exit polls found that an estimated 60 to 70 per cent of the Hamas supporters participated in the elections (ibid.: p. 136). By unofficially participating in the council elections, Hamas was able to exercise its influence without comprising its principled stand against the DOP, the opposition to the PA leadership and the prospects of Israeli domination of the elections. This strategy was also borne out by the fact that only those registering their vote in the PA elections were allowed to vote in the subsequent municipal elections, which Hamas not only contested but expected to win (Langohr 2001: p. 596).

In general, Islamist parties have fared badly in popular elections and referendums (Appendix II).[7] However, there are important exceptions to this general trend. The first country where the Islamists came to power through electoral processes was Algeria (Vandervalle 1997). After gaining independence from France in 1962, Algeria remained under quasi-military one-party rule that ended in the late 1980s due to a widening economic crisis that eventually lead to widespread demonstrations against the government in October 1988. This prompted a process of democratisation that began in 1989 with a national referendum opened up to multi-party elections. The municipal and provincial elections proved a humiliating defeat for the socialists and a stunning victory for the Islamist party Front Islamique de Salut (FIS). The unexpected victory gave FIS control of most of Algeria's local authorities (Milton-Edwards 2000: p. 169). Two years later, in 1991, the first round of elections to the national assembly was held. FIS, again, took a stunning lead, almost wiping out the more than 49 other parties contesting the election. Algeria was now within inches from having the "first democratic accession to power by a militant or fundamentalist party" (ibid.). Under growing pressure to suspend the second round of elections the government imposed a state of emergency in February 1992 and arrested the FIS leadership. In the coming years this gave rise to an Islamist insurgency that over time developed into a virtual civil war (see POLITICAL VIOLENCE).

In general, many analysts are sceptic of the prospects for developing Arab democracies (see, Anderson 2001). A special problem of participatory democracy is that many Arab states, in particular those labelled "rentier states," are based not on public participation but on abstention from public from political participation. Awash with oil revenues, they tend not to tax their citizens, who are provided public benefits (or goods) free of charge. The principle "no taxation, no representation" means that the state is not constrained by the

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[7] Recently, a coalition of Islamic parties in Pakistan achieved a similarly unexpected electoral victory, see Knudsen (2002b).

interests of its populace (Moaddel 2002b: p. 376). This fact may explain why democracy in Arab countries reverses prevailing theories (that there is a positive correlation between income and democracy): it is the poorer, not the richer, Arab countries which have taken steps towards democracy (Sadiki 2000: p. 88).[8] This may help explain why foreign aid has done little to promote democracy in the region (Carapico 2002): the United States alone has for the past decade spent more that US$ 250 million on democracy programmes with little impact (Ottaway et al. 2002: p. 7). This also ties in with the findings of Regan and Henderson (2002), who show that states with intermediate levels of democracy (semi-democracies) have the highest levels of political repression. A Middle East country that fits this general description is Egypt (Alterman 2000). These examples should not, however, be construed as proof that Islam and democracy are mutually exclusive (Midlarsky 1998).[9] Instead, it is worth remembering that while the evidence as to whether Islamists are committed to democracy are (as yet) inconclusive, there is ample evidence that most secular regimes in the Middle East are not (Langohr 2001: p. 608).

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[8] Out of seven world regions, the Arab countries had the lowest freedom score in the late 1990s (UNDP 2002: p. 27).

[9] It is perhaps telling that in a review of the anthropology of democracy, Julia Paley (2002) does not once mention democracy *and* Islam, reinforcing the image that they are incompatible.

3. Political violence

The growth of extreme political violence in the Middle East is often attributed to the tendency to suppress democratic expression and freedom of speech. The use of extreme violence is often considered a defining feature of the Islamist movement in general, whereas in actual fact, it remains an aberration. The level of political violence naturally depends on how it is defined, and especially how to separate terrorism from acceptable political violence (the concept of just war, in Islam and in Christianity). At present, a normative problem is that there is no readily accepted definition of terrorism.[10] This problem becomes especially acute when violence targets innocent victims and bystanders. An example of this problem is a recent report by the Human Rights Watch, which caused an uproar because it concluded that the Palestinian suicide bombers belonging to the armed wing of Hamas (the Qassam Brigades) were systematically targeting civilians, and therefore committing war crimes (HRW 2002).

A review of the reasons why terrorism occurs shows that they can be grouped into the following broad categories: *psychological explanations* (pathology, deprivation), *societal explanations* (economy, governance) and *state explanations* (sponsorship, hegemony, failed states) (Lia and Skjølberg 2000). It might seem that the most common explanations of so-called "Islamic terrorism" (in itself a misnomer) often combine these three explanations. In short, it is argued fundamentalist beliefs make adherents psychologically predisposed to use violence and surrender their lives (Taylor and Horgan 2001), that abysmal social conditions and frustration promote extremism (Andoni 1997), and that authoritarianism and secularism as well as political persecution have spurred a violent backlash from Islamist movements. We find here a contradiction between explanations which consider the use of violence a result of *internalizing* Islamist beliefs and those that locate them in the *externalizing* socio-political conditions (Langohr 2001: p. 591):

> The question of whether to resort to violence to achieve its goals is inherent in the Islamist project (that what some Islamists understand as a divine mandate to implement shari'a ultimately sanctions the use of force against dissenters) or contingent (that the violent exclusion of Islamists from the political arena has driven them to arms, best expressed by François Burgat's contention that any Western political party could be turned in to the Armed Islamic Group in weeks if subjected to the same repression and Islamists had endured) looms large in this debate.

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[10] A standard definition of (insurgent) terrorism is: "the deliberate and systematic use or threat of violence against instrumental (human) targets (C) in a conflict between two (A, B) or more parties, whereby the immediate victims C – who might not even be part of the conflicting parties – cannot, through change of attitude of behaviour, dissociate themselves from the conflict" (Schmid and Graaf 1982: p. 15).

Nonetheless, there is often a general assumption that fundamentalist beliefs predispose a person to violence (act violently, seek violent means). It has been claimed that Islam is based on a "binary world view" where the "Land of Islam" (*Dar al-Islam*) is contrasted with "The Land of War" (*Dar al-Harb*) or the "Land of Unbelief" (*Dar al-Kufr*). In important ways, it is argued, this particular world view predisposes Islam and believers of the faith to defeat the latter in order to promote the former (Lia and Kjøk 2001: p. 14).

It has long been acknowledged that a defining feature of terrorist attacks and other forms of extreme violence is that the ultimate purpose is not the carnage itself, but the *communicative message* this conveys to a set of spectators (local and trans-local) (Schmid and Graaf 1982). More concretely, it may be delineated as a transmitter (the terrorist), the intended recipient (target), message (bombing, ambush) and feedback (response of target) (see, Lia and Skjølberg 2000). There is, hence, what may be termed "the triangle of violence", which includes the relationships between performers, victims and witnesses. In conventional (military) combat, the opposing armies do everything in their power to limit the number of casualties, often resorting to high-tech wizardry to limit loss of life. In suicide missions the opposite applies: there is a 100 percent willingness to sacrifice one's life and the attacks are technologically simple (ibid.: p. 24). A typical example is a single person (male or female) setting off a home-made bomb strapped around the body in a crowd of innocent bystanders.

An important reason why such attacks are not condemned is that from an Islamic perspective, the terms "suicide missions" and "suicide bombers" are inappropriate. Islam forbids suicide (*intihar*), therefore the perpetrator is considered to have been a martyr (*mujahid*, *shahid*) who will embrace martyrdom (*shahadah*) (Euben 2002: p. 28). Etymologically the term *mujahadid* is related to the jihad, hence the act of sacrifice needs to be understood within the context of jihad itself. We can illustrate this by considering how jihad was interpreted by Palestinian Islamist groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which are perhaps the most prominent perpetrators of extreme political violence.

Hamas was formed in 1987 in the wake of the Palestinian uprising (*intifadah*) as an outgrowth of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood (Abu-Amr 1993: p. 10). Hamas was an ideological heir to the so-called *Mujamma* movement led by Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, whose main concern was Islamic preaching (*da'wa*) and teaching (*tarbiya*) in the Gaza strip. The movement had been involved in sporadic violence, but then only against fellow Palestinians. In an excellent article detailing the shift in Hamas' strategy from 1988, Beverley Milton-Edwards (1992) shows how the Palestinian uprising made Hamas popularise the notion of jihad. The details of Hamas' new strategy were laid out in the

Hamas Covenant issued in 1988, which is the organisation's main ideological document (Hamas 1988). The covenant underlines the importance of jihad, but, importantly, delimits the concept by applying it to ending the Israeli occupation of Palestine. According to the charter, there is no solution to Palestine problems except through jihad, and Article 15 in the covenant reads: "When an enemy occupies some of the Muslim lands, jihad becomes obligatory on every Muslim" (ibid.).

As Milton-Edwards shows, Hamas therefore applied jihad differently from the competing Palestinian Islamist movement, the Islamic Jihad. Although the goals of the two organisations overlap, Islamic Jihad tends towards a more universal application of jihad, including restoration of the Caliphate in all Muslim countries (ibid.). Hamas, on the other hand, shied away from an encompassing definition of jihad, restricting the term to opposition against Israel. Nonetheless, detailed studies of Hamas and its militant wing show that violence is used pragmatically, more often than not, in the form of calculated tit-for-tat retaliation against Israeli forces and more recently, civilians. According to the leaders of Hamas, "they are legitimately waging a jihad against foreign occupation" (Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe 2001: 50). The Hamas leaders are not alone in defending the use of extreme violence. The Egyptian deric Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, current in exile in Qatar, has argued that suicide bombings are fully in accord with Islamic teachings and represent "the most exalted form of martyrdom" (cited in, El-Affendi n.d.). Although this clearly is a minority view that is also opposed by reputed clerics such as the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar (Muhammad Hussein Tanawi), the popular support for Palestinian suicide missions is strong in all the Arab countries. In April 2002 the Saudi Ambassador in London, Ghazi al-Qusaibi, created a stir when he published a poem in a London-based Arabic newspaper which paid tribute to Palestinian suicide bombers as dying "to honor God's word" (MEMRI 2002). In particular, Al-Qusaibi hailed the teenager Ayat Akhras, a quiet schoolgirl, who detonated explosives strapped to her body at a Jerusalem supermarket, killing two Israelis and injuring twenty-five (in March 2001). The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a militant group allied with Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, said it was responsible for sending Ayat to kill herself. [11] The willingness to use extreme violence is something that many, including those sympathetic to the goals of the organisation and the plight of the Palestinians, find unacceptable.

Overall, the field known as "terrorism studies" tends see violence perpetrated by Islamist radicals as a special type that has been branded the "new terrorism" (Lia and Kjøk 2001: p. 8). They are set apart from ordinary terrorists by their *personality*, *rationality* and

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[11] Ayat Akhras was the third Palestinian woman to die carrying out a suicide attack. For a detailed account of the personal history and background of the Palestinian suicide bombers [in Norwegian], see Nome (2002).

organisation. They are portrayed as *more violent* than "secular terrorists", the attacks are considered *irrational,* that is, defying rational cost-benefit calculations, and the attackers belong to *closed circles* led by a spiritual leader and linked to other groups of similar persuasion through informal *networks* (ibid.: p. 8). On closer inspection, however, the first two assumptions appear questionable when compared with available data. For example, the case given above (Ayat Akhras) defies the claim to a terrorist personality. She had no previous history of violence abuse, she was not a member of any Islamist organisation – in fact two organisations refused her plea for help to carry our her mission – until she finally persuaded the Al-Aqsa Brigades to assist her. The second assertion, that "Islamic terrorism" defies cost-benefit calculations, also appears wrong.

For example, if we look at the attacks carried out by the two best known Palestinian Islamist groups, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, they are neither indiscriminate nor irrational but rather carefully planned and executed. As Kydd and Walter demonstrate, terrorist attacks in the Middle East "show a clear and recurring pattern where violence is timed to coincide with major events in the peace process" (2002: p. 263-264). Examining the period 1988–98, Kydd and Walter find that the use of extreme violence reduces the likelihood that peace agreements will be successful. Especially where the parties to the conflict do not trust each other (as in the Israel-Palestine conflict) terrorist attacks are very likely to derail a nascent peace process (ibid: p. 289).[12] Although, terrorist activity is "patterned" it is not easily predictable, and there is no standard distribution curve ("non-Gaussian curve distribution"); therefore it is difficult to predict when terrorist strikes might occur (Cordesman 2000). This makes preventing terrorist attacks costly and more so because of unregulated money transmissions have made "terrorist finance" very hard to control (Winer and Roule 2002). This may also be linked with a common characteristic of groups involved in extreme violence (religious or secular), that the organisation is loosely structured around a number of independent "cells" that may span several countries, something making them hard to target. In some cases these cells may be considered nodes in a terrorist *network* that enables them to carry out coordinated attacks requiring specialist training, informal financing and complex strategic planning. The most prominent organisation of this type is the Al Qaeda (Simon 2002), but sensationalist reportage of the organisation and its leader Osama bin Laden conveniently forgets that most Arab countries and Muslims reject the organisation's methods and agenda (Al Sayyid 2002). Furthermore, it is worth noting that most militant Islamic groups in the Arab world are not international in scope but dependent on local sources of support, especially money and weapons (Khashan 1997).

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[12] The details of the troubled peace process (1987–96) and the strategy of the Islamist opposition in Palestine is covered in Milton-Edwards (1996b).

Still, the use of violence, and especially extreme violence, varies among Islamist groups. The group often cited as being the most violent is the Algerian "Armed Islamic Group" (Groupe Islamique Armée), better know under its acronym "GIA". Founded in 1989, it emerged as the leading insurgent organisation, which unlike the rival Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) (see DEMOCRACY), condemned the elections and refused to cooperate with the Algerian regime. Since the elections were suspended in 1991, Algeria has been seized by a wave of violence. Between 1992 and 1998 the country was thrown into a virtual civil war that pitched the military-backed regime against a complex, clandestine opposition derived from the country's banned Islamist movement, the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS). Official figures put the number of people killed during this period at 100,000, that is about 1,200 deaths per month (CrisisWeb Online). In mid-1997, the armed wing of FIS, the Army of Islamic Salvation (AIS), declared a unilateral cease-fire (Gerges 1999). AIS even collaborated with the Algerian regime in its fight against GIA. Currently most analysts agree that GIA is no longer capable of destabilising the regime and has alienated itself from ordinary Algerians (see, Lia and Kjøk 2001).

4. Theories

There are currently a large number of books and articles on all aspects of political Islam in the Middle East, but it is rarer to see any explicit theorising aimed at explaining the Islamic revival itself. In many studies there is an implicit assumption that the revival is a result of relative deprivation (see, Gurr 1970), in particular oppressive state policies and social injustice. A general problem with these assumptions is that they may explain the revival in some countries in the Middle East but not in others. At the moment, there seems to be no single theory that can account for the many "faces" of political Islam in such diverse settings as, for example, Turkey (democratic Islamism), Iran (Islamic revolution), Egypt (Islamist opposition) and Algeria (Islamist terror).

In this section a range of theories (or rather, theory clusters) are presented under three broad headings: civilisational, social and textual.[13] The first theory cluster is made up of macro-sociological theories aiming at explaining the dynamics of Islamic civilisations internally (*dynastic theories*), and externally vis-à-vis an external power (*civilisational theories*). Next, a second cluster of theories that focus on social processes is reviewed. They locate the Islamic revival not in religion but in the social and political context in which it embedded (*crisis theories*, *cultural duality theories, state culture theories* and *resurgency theory*). The third theory cluster locates the Islamic revival in Islam's founding texts and doctrine as well as religious worship. In the first instance, Islam is considered a shared discourse (beliefs, rituals and symbols) that is shaped by local socio-political conditions (*discursive theories*). Alternatively, the starting point is that Muslim activists are united by a shared belief in Islam as an alternative to secular ideologies, creating a potent socio-political force *(textualist theories)*.

Dynastic theories
The first sociological theory of the foundations of the Islamic state and the tension between political (royalty) and religious leadership (caliphate) was developed by the medieval historian Ibn Khaldun (1333–1406) in his masterpiece, *Muqaddimah* (1377 (1967)). In this book he developed a sociological and historiographic account of the cyclical rise and fall of urban civilisations. The main reason for this, Khaldun argued, was the gradual erosion of the cement of society so to speak, namely "group solidarity" (*asabiyya*). Group solidarity and military prowess was a defining feature of nomadic tribes and this enabled them to overwhelm and conquer urban civilisation and develop a new dynasty on its ruins. Over time, however, the new dynasty would itself succumb to weakening solidarity among its populace and excesses by its rulers and fall prey to nomadic conquerors. Importantly,

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[13] The latter two are based on Moaddel (2002b).

Khaldun argued that the only way to create an enduring state was to find a lasting alternative to *asabiyya,* one that was based not on social solidarity but on the religious authority of the Sharia. Nonetheless, we find in Khaldun's work an early argument in favour of "the differentiation between religious and secular leadership" (Moaddel 2002b: p. 367), a philosophical problem that had engaged Muslim thinkers since the end of the reign of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (632–1258).[14]

Civilisational theories

Ibn Khaldun's seminal work may be considered a precursor to the civilisational theories with its emphasis on the antithetic relations between opposing entities destined for an apocalyptic conflict. The idea of a civilisational clash has long been a powerful metaphor in which to interpret the Islamist revival and the Islamic Middle East as a predatory civilisation threatening the West (Ahmed 2002). This notion was elevated to scientific theory with the publishing of Samuel Huntington's article in *Foreign Affairs*, titled "The Clash of Civilizations?" (1993). In this article and the subsequent book with the same title, he warned that the fault lines of modern conflict will be not empires or states but "civilizations" (Huntington 1996).[15] Huntington lists a total of eight discrete civilisations and proposes that conflict between them will result in a cataclysmic endgame threatening world peace. This in particular will occur along the fault lines between the "Islamic" and the "Judeo-Christian" civilisations. Huntington's thesis has been debunked both on normative (Salla 1997) and empirical grounds (Fox 2001, Russett et al. 2000). In order to understand the normative aspect of Huntington's position it seems important to consider Michael Salla's (1997) distinction between "essentialists" and "contingenists". In short, Salla argues that "essentialists" such as Huntington, Daniel Pipes and Bernard Lewis give prominence to the textual interpretation of Islam, which they consider an enduring and immutable insight into the essence of Islam and the Muslim world. They maintain that Islam is a monolithic threat to the West (see, Knudsen 2002a: pp. 10-11). It is therefore important to find ways to neutralise this threat, especially for the US, which is the principal target of Islamist terrorism (Pinto 1999). Opposed to this view we find scholars insisting on the diversity of Islamic movements and on their being shaped by contingent factors, hence the label "contingenists". Among its most prominent members we find John Esposito, Edward Said and James Piscatori. They advocate a more cautious approach, one that acknowledges that Islam can serve as a vehicle for social progress and that Islam's diversity is both more liberal and more democratic than is often acknowledged (see DEMOCRACY). Among its many detractors, this view is often criticised as being

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[14] For details of political ideas in early Islamic religious thought, see van Ess (2001).
[15] The civilisational argument was prefigured in Lewis' article "The Roots of Muslim Rage" (1990), and rehearsed in his recent book "What Went Wrong?" (2002). The basic idea is that at some point in history, the Islamic Middle East went terribly wrong and there is an urgent need to "put it right".

"apologetic" and failing to acknowledge the intimidating side of political Islam that curbs freedom of expression and threatens legitimate governments.

Crisis theories

The crisis theories take as their starting point that the Islamic revival is a response to various forms of economic, political and cultural crisis (Moaddel 2002b: p. 371). In general, this approach includes a large number of explanatory variables but lacks a model for how they may be interconnected. The theory can also be questioned on empirical grounds. Neither the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (1920s, 1930s), the growing Islamic activism in Iran in the 1960s, nor radical Islamism in Algeria, Jordan and Syria in the 1960s and 1970s were periods characterised by profound economic crisis. These examples, hence, show that the Islamic revival cannot be explained as a popular response to economic decline and the failure of modernisation. Moreover, the bulk of the supporters and leaders of the Islamist movements belonged to the new middle class, further undermining the view that fundamentalism was simply a result of popular discontent by the disenfranchised lumpenproletariat (ibid.).

Cultural duality theories

Seeking to overcome the many shortcomings of the crisis theories, the cultural duality theories posit a tension between the power of the state and the religious leadership (Moaddel 2002b: p. 372). When the state seeks to limit the authority of the religious clergy and remove their privileges, this sparks a countervailing reaction of political opposition. The theory is especially applicable to Shia Islam, where the clergy has a more autonomous position than in Sunni Islam. The cultural duality models have been used to explain, first of all, the rise of revolutionary movements in Iran. This theory seeks to explain the Iranian revolution (1977–79) by reference to the independent religious position of the Shii ulama (clergy), which accounts for their ability to challenge the state successfully. While the theory does show the tension between *religion* and *regime,* it fails to explain the broad-based appeal of political opposition expressed through revivalist Islamic movements (ibid.).

State culture theories

Like the cultural duality theories, state culture theories seek to explain Islamic revival as an outcome of the tension between regime and religion, but adopt a more dynamic approach to shifts in state policies and religious discourse (Moaddel 2002b: p. 373). Attempts by the state to invade the religious domain, constrain religious expression or otherwise shift the balance of power in their favour are believed to cause an Islamist backlash. Empirical examples in favour of this theory are the rise of radical Islamism in Algeria in the early 1970s following land reform and leftist polices that alienated large sections of society from

the regime (see POLITICAL VIOLENCE). In the same vein the radicalisation of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers was a response to increasing authoritarianism after the military coup in 1952. The assassination of the MB founder Hassan al-Banna, and torture of its members served to further radicalize the MB as well as its chief ideologue, Sayyid Qutb (see INTRODUCTION). These incidents induced the MB to abandon its former policy and develop a militant agenda that was in stark contrast to the movement's moderate stance in the 1930s and 40s (Kepel 1985). On a more general level, the state culture theory may be used to explain a cultural conflict between Islam and secularism, and how extreme examples of the latter, what Esposito has termed "militant secular fundamentalism", provoke an Islamic revival. Examples of this phenomenon may be found in Egypt, Syria and Iran. In Jordan, on the other hand, the non-ideological nature of the regime precluded the formation of an Islamic opposition (see, Moaddel 2002a). Instead, the Islamist movement in Jordan has been a force in democratic expansion (Robinson 1997). Despite the success of representative democracy in Jordan, women are under-represented there as in most other Arab countries (Faqir 2001).

Resurgence theory

Resurgence theory borrows aspects from both crisis theories and state culture theories. The theory takes at its starting point that the Islamic revival is foremost a reaction to the failure of modernisation in Middle East countries (Milton-Edwards 1996a: p. 4ff). The starting point is the colonial era which created a number of artificial nation states whose leaders embraced Western-oriented secular ideologies and pan-Arabism to forge a national identity and legitimize their grip on power. The defeat of Arab forces by Israel in 1967 led to a widespread identity crisis that made the masses turn away from the secular nation-state and embrace Islam as a vehicle towards spiritual renewal and a revival of the Islamic state. Discussing the relevance of this theory to the Palestinian case, Milton-Edwards finds that rather than linked to the chain of events after 1967, it was a result of traits inherent in the Palestinian situation itself that served as a catalyst for political Islam, mainly after 1982 when the PLO was defeated in Lebanon. The radicalisation within Palestine was in large part spurred by Israeli policies meant to suppress and eradicate the nationalist movements, but was neither defeatist nor the result of an identity crisis (ibid.).

Discursive theories

Moving away from social processes, an alternative way to approach the study of Islamic revival is through the symbolic role of religion. This approach is premised on Clifford Geertz's (1973) definition of religion as "cultural system", and on the powerful, evocative potential of religious symbolism.[16] In this approach, Islamic texts and doctrine become

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[16] Religion is: "A system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and

secondary to the main question, which is how Islam is played out in the daily lives of Muslims, especially how Islam is used as a vehicle for political mobilisation (Moaddel 2002b: p. 375). Important figures within this tradition, Eickelman and Piscatori, point to two processes that shape Muslim politics. The first is *objectification,* which means that Islam is no longer simply practised, but questioned by its practitioners. The second process is *fragmentation*, meaning that the clergy (*ulama*) are no longer the sole interpreters of Islamic doctrine, but challenged by a mixed breed of professionals (doctors, lawyers etc.) who likewise seek intellectual control of Islam. In themselves, however, these processes cannot alone account for the rise of Islamic activism (ibid.: p. 376).

The symbolic approach to the study of religion was borne out of a conviction that Islam was about humans and not religious dogma. This served to legitimise most anthropologists' ignorance of scripturalist Islam (Lindholm 2002). This ignorance was also based on a pragmatic division of labour between the different disciplines: the Orientalists' textual exegeses and Quran studies were complemented by anthropologists' focus on Islamic symbols and popular belief.[17] While anthropologists now show a greater concern for history and scripturalist Islam (Lindholm 1999), the importance of the scripturalist as opposed to popular interpretations persists, as well as the tension between Muslim dogma and political life (Lindholm 1995: p. 815). Still, most of the studies undertaken by anthropologists in the Middle East tend to focus on key disciplinary issues such as tribalism (Gellner 1969), feudalism (Gilsenan 1996) and honour (Abu-Lughod 1986) rather than targeting Islam and its adherents as such (but see, Donnan 2002, Gilsenan 1990a). In general, anthropological accounts have been validated by the importance of *orthopraxy* (correct conduct) rather than *orthodoxy* (correct beliefs) in the Islamic faith and Muslim religious worship (Lindholm 2002: p. 113).

Textual theories
Unlike the discursive theories outlined above, the textual theories seek find the answer to the growth of political Islam in religion itself (orthodoxy), that is the founding religious texts (Quran) and traditions of the Prophet (Sunna, Hadith). Often identified simply as Islamic studies, this approach has been boosted in the current "post 9/11" climate: there is a general tendency in academia to revert to scripturalist scholarship and textual exegesis as a means of uncovering the hidden meaning of the Islamic revival and the roots of the fundamentalist revolt (see, Lewis 2002). Among scholars engaged in textual analysis there

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clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz 1973).

[17] In the same manner, those trained in classical Arabic were at the time woefully ignorant of the Arabic vernacular (Craig 2001) so that none of the disciplines were equipped to tackle society, culture *and* religion of the Middle East. Indeed, to anthropologists the very category "Middle East" proved a problematic unit of study, see Gilsenan (1990b).

is currently no consensus as to whether Islamic texts are compatible with "an ideal typical conception of rationalisation and political modernisation" (Moaddel 2002b: p. 380). In order to advance textual studies of Islam, Moaddel argues for a broader approach that not only considers the Islamic texts in isolation, but compares them with those of other cultural traditions (e.g., Western tradition) as well as other literary genres (narrative, legends) found in the Arab world (ibid.).

Nonetheless, in order to move beyond mere "representations" of the Muslim world, Fred Halliday has advocated a middle ground between "textual" and "discursive" approaches in order to uncover the "real" Muslim world. Likewise, Michael Salla (1997) has advocated a convergence approach where political Islam is not seen as temporary aberration to be contained and eventually stamped out, but, on a theoretical level, as a much needed critique of the deficiencies of the Western liberal democratic paradigm, thereby allowing political Islam, as religious revival, to develop into a genuine political force (see CONCLUSION).

5. Conclusion: "Old Islamism" or "New Islamism"?

This report has shown that most of the contemporary research is devoted to what may be termed the "Old Islamism", whose main attribute is the alleged threat Islamic fundamentalism poses to secular regimes in the Middle East and Western democracies considered enemies of Islam. This essentialist "gloom and doom" approach foregrounds what John Esposito has called the triple threat of Islam: demographic, political and civilisational. As François Burgat (2002: p. xvi) has noted;

> by confining itself to this misleading perspective, the West is depriving itself of understanding that at least part of the demands voiced by this generation of Islamists is no more illegitimate than those expressed by their nationalist fathers in their time (who also had to revert to violence *mutatis mutandis*)".

Many analysts will, however, consider Burgat's approach "apologetic" and conveniently masking the fact that the inherent programme of political Islam is undemocratic and totalitarian (see, Salla 1997). As James Craig notes (2001), Islam, which should otherwise be considered an "enviable asset" of Muslim countries, is castigated as a scourge that keeps people forever stuck in a medieval and barbaric past or, at best, as an obstacle to peaceful progress and economic and democratic liberalisation. The fronts between these two opposing views on Islam are harsh and uncompromising and the battle between the "apologists" (contingenists) and "orientalists" (essentialists) is set to dominate research on Islamism for years to come (Milton-Edwards 2002: p. 39).

In order to move the debate beyond this divide, there is a need for a more nuanced perspective on the Islamist movements in the Middle East. First, while most of the scholarly work is on the fringe Islamist movements known for their use of violence, there is a tendency to neglect the quietist groups that condemn the use of violence and are committed to peaceful protest despite the brutal suppression of political dissent that is common to many Middle East countries. In order to get a better grasp of the breadth of the Islamist movement, there is a need for a new perspective along the lines suggested by Beverley Milton-Edwards (2002: p. 48), who advocates a greater emphasis on long-term fieldwork to build first-hand knowledge of Islamist groups, their leaders and adherents. Moreover, there is also a need to engage with scholars in the Middle East whose research is often ignored or passed over.

This also fits in with the fact that we know comparatively little about the grassroots' members of the Islamist movements and the popular sentiments they embody. There is, hence, a need to continue along the lines of Saad Eddin Ebrahim's (1980) pioneering study of the populist bases of Egyptian Islamists as well as more recent work on the socio-spatial dimension of contemporary Islamism (see, Ismail 2000, on Egypt). Such studies may also contribute to developing theories of Islamist movements in general.

In particular there seems to be a need for studying the dynamics of contemporary social movements as vehicles of the Islamist revival. While the study of Islam and social movements is not a novel theme (see, Lapidus and Burke 1988, Zubaida 1993), and in fact Islam began as a social movement, more attention needs to be paid to modern Islamic movements (see review by, Edelman 2001). Especially, it seems important, as Moaddel (2002b: p. 379) has suggested, to engage in a comparative analysis of Islamic movements in the Middle East.

As Moaddel (2002b) has pointed out, there is a range of competing theories as to what are the driving forces behind the Islamist revival. None of them is capable of accounting for the diversity of the popular support for political Islam throughout the Middle East (see, Woltering 2002), but each seeks to explain them as an outcome of a combination of social (injustice), political (oppression) and religious (secularism) factors. Most probably the revival is caused a number of contingent factors, hence the importance of cautioning against simplistic accounts of what is in reality highly complex phenomenon (see, Milton-Edwards 2000: p. 134). Research that attempts to highlight this complexity would therefore be particularly important.

There is also reason to caution against research on "Islamic terrorism" that reiterates dogmatic accounts of Islam and the Sharia's inherent tendency towards violence and terrorism. This is reflected in the tendency to give precedence to the most violent movements (Bangstad 2002: p. 6) and to portraying the views of their leaders (Appleby 1997, JPS 2002) rather than those of their members and supporters. There is as yet little serious research on violence perpetrated in the name of religion (but see, Juergensmeyer 2000) compared to the many simplistic accounts touting the threat of a "holy war" based on a biased reading Islam's founding texts.

This also fits in with the call for a greater concern with the Muslim discourse rather than Islamic beliefs per se. This line of reasoning takes as its starting point that rather than shared beliefs, "political Islam became a potent revolutionary force precisely because it meant different things to different people" Moaddel (2002b: p. 379). This view is echoed by Graham Fuller (2002: p. 50), who finds that "Islamism has become, in fact, the primary

vehicle and vocabulary of most political discourse throughout the Muslim world". From this perspective, Islamism is not a spent force locked in decline, but able to articulate political dissent and popular discontent in such a way as to remain a potent political movement.

It is exactly this capacity for development within the Islamist movement that is suggested by James Piscatori (2002), who argues that:

> One way is to assume that ideological rigidity or perhaps incoherence renders Islamism incapable of real development; it is, therefore, destined to fail. Another possibility, however, is that the very ambiguity of Islamist thought, in addition to providing the practical advantage of attracting a broad constituency, allows space for the flexible development of talismanic ideas such as the "Islamic state." If this view is taken, then, far from being destined to decline, Islamism is capable of adaptation and growth.

The latter perspective is central to the prospect for a democratic transformation of the Islamist movement, what has been termed the "New Islamism" (Langohr 2001). This perspective has been advanced among others by Anthony Shadid (2002), who in particular emphasised the transformation of the Lebanese Hizbollah as well as the Egyptian Centre Party as examples of the current democratic trend. Shadid is not alone in seeing Islamic movements being recast. In a forthcoming book Oliver Roy (2003) argues that the Islamist movements are relinquishing their international agenda in favour of a nationalist framework. More research on this and other aspects of the remaking of the Islamist movement in the Middle East is important not only for its theoretical implications, but more so, to counter the stereotypical portrayal of the Islamist movements as irrational, undemocratic and violent.

Appendix I: Persons met

Abdelwahab el-Affendi	Centre for the Study of Democracy	London
Farhan Nizami	Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies	Oxford
Mohammed Talib	Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies	Oxford
Robert Spingborg	London Middle East Institute at SOAS	London
Zami Zubaida	Birkbeck College, University of London	London
Emad S. Shahin.	American University of Cairo	Cairo
Mustapha Al Sayyid	American University of Cairo	Cairo
Amr Hamzawi	American University of Cairo	Cairo
Dia'a Rashwan,	Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies	Cairo
Muhammad A. Khalidi	American University of Beirut	Beirut
Ahmad Mousalli	American University of Beirut	Beirut

Appendix II

Islamist Performance in Parliamentary Elections, 1965–1995

Country	Year	Islamist Party	% of votes	% of seats
Algeria	1991	Islamic Salvation Front	--	81.4[*]
Bangladesh	1979	Muslim League & Islamic Democratic League	--	6.1
	1986	Jamaat-i-Islam & Muslim League	--	4.2
	1991	Jamaat-i-Islam	--	5.5
Egypt	1987	Alliance including Muslim Brothers	17.5	12.4
Indonesia	1971	Muslim Scholars' Party, Indonesian Muslim Party, Muslim Political Federation, and Muslim Party	27.2	26.1
	1977	United Development Party	29.3	27.5
	1982	United Development Party	25.5	25.8
	1987	United Development Party	--	15.3
Jordan	1989	Muslim Brothers & allied independents	--	42.5
	1993	Islamic Action Front	--	20.0
Kuwait	1981	Islamic Society for Social Reform	--	10.0[**]
	1985	Independents	--	12.0
	1992	Independents	--	38.0
Pakistan	1965	Combined Opposition Parties including Jamaat-e-Islami	--	8.4
	1970	Jamaat-e-Islami	--	1.4
	1977	Pakistan National Alliance including Jamaat-e-Islami, Moslem League, Jumiat-e-Ulema-e-Pakistan	--	18.0
	1988	Islamic Democratic Alliance including Jamaat-e-Islami-e-Pakistan	29.6	26.8
	1990	Islamic Democratic Alliance including Jamaat e-Islami-e-Pakistan	37.4	51.2
	1993	Pakistan Islamic Front, Islamic Jamhoori Mahaz, & Mutahida Deeni Mahaz	--	4.5
Sudan	1986	National Islamic Front	--	19.6
Tunisia	1989	Independents	12**	0.0
Turkey	1973	National Salvation Party	11.8	10.7
	1977	National Salvation Party	8.6	5.3
	1987	Welfare Party	7.2	0.0
	1991	Welfare Party	16.9	13.8
	1995	Welfare Party	21.1**	28.7**
Yemen	1988	Independents	--	~25
	1993	Yemen Alliance for Reform	--	20.7

*First-round results only (188 of 231 seats). Another 199 seats were to have been decided in run-off elections in January 1992 that were cancelled by the military.
**From journalistic and secondary sources.
Source: (Web document Online)

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Summary

This report provides an overview of the political Islam in the Middle East, with a special emphasis on the Islamic resurgence in the Levant (Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria). Following an introduction to the ideological roots of present-day Islamist movements, the report examines the prospects for popular democracy amidst widespread political violence. In brief, the report shows that Islam need not be incompatible with democracy and that there is a tendency to neglect the fact that many Middle Eastern countries have been engaged in a brutal suppression of Islamist movements, causing them to take up arms against the state. In the third section the report reviews some of the theories used to explain the Islamic revival and discusses their empirical significance. The conclusion argues in favour of moving beyond the "gloom and doom" approach that portrays Islamism as an illegitimate political expression and a potential threat to the West ("Old Islamism"). Instead, there is an urgent need for a more nuanced understanding of the current democratisation of the Islamist movements that is now taking place throughout the Middle East ("New Islamism").

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