Unit 8: Fundamentalisms

Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will

Be aware of the following

- Variety within Islamic thought and practice
- Interchangeability of terms used to describe Muslim militant fundamentalist schools of thought
- Differences between Muslim revivalists and extremist fanatics
- Emotionally charged political nature of the term terrorist when paired with Islam.
- Private, personal dimensions of Islam as practiced by many adherents
- Reasons for the resurgence of Islamic Fundamentalism
- Contribution of militant Islam’s successes in Iran and Afghanistan to fanatic extremists
- Afghanistan’s Taliban movement
- Western values commonly rejected by Arab traditionalists
- Differing Middle East nation/state responses to the West

Identify

- Religious nationalism
- Muslim revivalists
- Taliban
- Islamic radical fanatics
- Militant Islamists

Realize

- Militant Islam is but a segment of the larger picture of world-wide Islam
- Many militant Islamists embrace aspects of secularist, modern thought
- Ever changing, fluid nature of many fanatical groups
• Not all Arabs look favorably upon the West
• Militant extremism may serve as a rallying point for discontented minorities in Middle East
"Most Muslims are impressed by the irony of the West’s current concern with Islamic fundamentalism given that, for the greater part of the Cold War, Islam was perceived as a faithful Western ally sharing an aversion to godless communism."

"We need to be careful of that emotive label, fundamentalism, and distinguish, as Muslims do, between revivalists, who choose to take the practice of their religion most devoutly, and fanatics or extremists, who use this devotion for political ends." Prince of Wales, "Islam and the West," *IQRA*, p. 18.

I. Diversity Within Islam

There is no single Islamic voice. Muslims are as diverse as each of the countries in which they live. As with other major religions of the world, the degree and intensity of practice by Muslim adherents varies.
For clarification, the following chart may assist in plotting various Islamic schools of thought.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>nominalists</th>
<th>moderates</th>
<th>fundamentalists</th>
<th>extremists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>traditionalists</td>
<td>uncompromisers</td>
<td>revivalists</td>
<td>fanatics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamists</td>
<td>militants</td>
<td>renegades</td>
<td>&quot;politicized Islam&quot;</td>
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Most of the American media attention given Islam focuses on the radical, extremist edge. Such characterizations do not treat the majority of Islamic adherents.

Because the media treats fundamentalist and extremist Islam so extensively, this section primarily seeks to understand these schools of thought.

The perspective of Lt. Gen. Anthony Zinni, deputy commander of U.S. Central Command, clarified the fundamentalist--extremist distinction in a recent Army Times interview.

"We’re very careful to separate fundamentalism from extremism...Some people relate fundamentalism and extremism as being the same. We don’t. There are fundamentalists that are not violent, that are not hostile, they just have a very conservative approach to their religion. (18 Nov 96, p. 10.)"

Scholar Seyyed Nasr offers a healthy perspective on the place of fundamentalist and extremist movements within Islam.
“Traditional Islam is like the mountain on whose slopes various geological processes, such as weathering and sedimentation created by streams, take place. It is these processes that can be compared to modernism, fundamentalism, and the like and that are usually studied by scholars accustomed to the study of change and oblivious to the vast, permanent mountain on whose slopes these changes are taking place.” ("Islam" in Our Religions, p. 515)

There is variety within the fundamentalist and extremist traditions. Author Judith Miller, in her exhaustive study of Fundamentalisms within the Middle East, finds militant Islam to become “even more fragmented and diverse,” distinct from country to country. (See God Has Ninety-Nine Names, p. 14)

II. Worldwide Religious Nationalism

Professor Mark Juergensmeyer, in his book The New Cold War, Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State, sees fundamentalist Islam (Muslim religious nationalism) within the context of a larger, world-wide resurgence of religious fundamentalism (termed “religious nationalism” by Dr. Juergensmeyer). The University of Minnesota’s Caesar Farah agrees.
"Falling back on religion is not unique with Islamists today. [Consider] India’s xenophobic Hindu movement, Orthodox Jews in Israel demanding a religious state, Buddhists in east Asia seeking the same end. Catholics in eastern Europe, Latin America and the Philippines, ‘all have turned to their faith to define their goals and to mobilize.’" ("Political Dimensions of Islamic Fundamentalism," Digest of Middle East Studies, Spring 1996, p. 10.)

III. Understanding Islamic Fundamentalism

Britain’s Lieutenant Commander David Kibble categorizes various Muslim types by the following three axes.

1. The Religious Axis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modernist</th>
<th>Revivalist</th>
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"Modernist Muslims interpret their faith in terms of modern knowledge. They tend to accept Western scientific ideas—such as evolution—as well as the political ideal of democracy and women’s emancipation. They interpret the Qur’an and Muslim tradition to accommodate their ideas.” ("Understanding Fundamentalism," Military Review, Sep 95, p. 41.)

"[R]evivalists reject Western ideas and call for restoring traditional Islamic ideas. They believe in literal creation, accept the Qur’an as [God’s] actual writings which should be followed as such, and press for an Islamic state based upon Sharia...Revivalists are sometimes called fundamentalists because they wish to return to their faith’s original tenets... Fundamentalism, in its militant Islamic sense, is just one variant of revivalism. Revivalism may also be a
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quietest type, which retains traditional religious belief but espouses a less politically active stance.” (p. 41.)

2. The Evangelical Axis

Private Faith                  Muslim State

"At one end is the Muslim who believes his faith is a purely private affair, while at the other is the Muslim who believes [God] wants the whole world to become a Muslim state or series of states.” (p. 41.)

3. The Political Axis

Quietist                     Terrorist

"At the one end is the nonactivist or quietest...We are for peaceful change in society. Mainly, our aim is to educate people, to train people how to live their lives well in relation to religion....

[A]t the other is the Muslim who embraces terrorism as a legitimate political action. 'The Qur’an commands: 'Wage war until all disobedience (of divine law) is wiped out!’...Once we have won the war...we shall turn to other wars.'” (p. 41.)
Judith Miller, in describing the spectrum found within the political axis, finds many Muslim traditionalists as "shunning politics in principle." (See God Has Ninety-Nine Names, p. 17)

4. Fluid Nature

Categories describing various schools of thought within Islam blur and shift.

Writes Judith Miller, "...many an Islamic movement is simultaneously a political group, a militia, and an amalgam of terror cells. Yesterday's terrorist can be today's peacemaker, and vice versa...But such flexibility suggests that militant groups should be evaluated not only by their words but also by their deeds, and over time." (God Has Ninety-Nine Names, p. 17.)

IV. The Fundamentalist Resurgence

Reasons for the revival of Islamic fundamentalism vary from author to author. The following responses draw heavily from Lt. Col. David Kibble's "Understanding Islamic Fundamentalism" and Judith Miller's God Has Ninety-Nine Names.

1. Disenchantment

Rapid urbanization and industrialization in the Middle East cause many traditional peoples to feel displaced, uncomfortable, and ill at ease within the new surroundings. "Muslims moving to urban areas found themselves confronted with 20th-century Western ideas and commercialism, which led to a sense of not belonging. This led them to turn to Islam's familiar roots." (Kibble, p. 42.)

The Prince of Wales emphasizes this sense of disillusionment with the West. "Among the many religious, social and political causes of what we might more accurately call the Islamic revival is a powerful feeling of disenchantment, of the realization that..."
Western technology and material things are insufficient, and that a deeper meaning to life lies elsewhere in the essence of Islamic belief.” (Prince Charles, “Islam and the West”.)

2. Demographic Implications of population explosion and resulting poverty. The demographic explosion, with resultant problems associated with overpopulation, contributes to the sense of estrangement. The straining of national resources and accompanying destitution experienced by the masses drives some to seek solace in traditional Islamic belief.

3. Populist Appeal The Islamic revolution in Iran, coupled with successes by Mujahedin in Afghanistan, empower many to seek a renewed identity within their traditional faith.

4. Response to Perceived Western Manipulation
"The West appears to selectively support Middle Eastern nations out of self-interest, particularly in terms of oil and defense contracts, while condemning other countries for poor human rights records...

Western policy is often not about human rights issues at all, but about economic self-interests.” (Kibble, p. 44.)
Pakistani journalist Mushahid Hussain elaborates. "...the West applies different standards to Muslim and non-Muslim countries in the areas of religion, democracy, military power, terrorism and human rights. So-called Islamic fundamentalism has replaced communism as the West's bugbear." ("Cold War against Islam", Far Eastern Economic Review, 2 Jul 1992, p. 22)

5. Reaction to Oil Dollars  Related to the perception of Western manipulation is the theory expounded by Egyptian intellectual Muhammad Sid Ahmed. As referred to in God Has Ninety-Nine Names, oil dollars "'corrupted politically and intellectually an entire generation and produced, in reaction, a cynical, puritanical Islamic generation.'" (p. 468)

6. Political Expediency  This is practiced by some rulers who legitimize themselves through Islam. General Khalid Bin Sultan, in his description of Saddam Hussein, identifies this leader as someone who uses religion out of self-interest. (See Desert Warrior, p. 230)

7. Political Opposition  These are factions who use Islam to unite against the majority.

Fundamentalist Islam can provide a rallying point—a voice for the disinherited—for opposition parties in some Middle Eastern countries.
In addition to reasons listed above, Judith Miller, (p. 468), in describing the many factors contributing to the Islamic revival, identifies the following as also aiding militant Islam’s rise.

- Collapse of Arab nationalism after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.
- Fall of the Soviet Union/Marxist dream of the late 1980s.
- Failure of most Middle Eastern governments to deliver on ambitious promises made after independence.
- Cold war Western support to Muslim groups as insurance against Communist encroachment.

V. Selected Islamic Views on Fundamentalism

Offering a different perspective from the above, Pakistan-based columnist Mushahid Hussain sees the recent Islamic reassertion as “quite normal and should not be a cause for concern in the West.” (‘Cold War Against the Islam,’ Far Eastern Economic Review, 2 Jul 1992, p. 22, NS 3300, p. 70.) According to Mushahid, Iran and Afghanistan bolstered Islamic self-confidence and debunked the myth of superpower invincibility.

Mushahid Hussain sees three areas where the resurgence of Islam can be seen in a positive light.

1. Politics Islam helps reassert and represent forces opposing the West or corrupt, “puppet” monarchies.

2. Culture The mosque becomes a symbol for reassertion of uniting, traditional values.
3. Foreign Affairs  Fundamentalist Islam can serve as a voice for unification in the arena of international affairs.

4. Extremism

What receives even less attention in our Western press is the condemnation--by Islamic leaders themselves--of Muslim extremist practices.

Afghanistan’s Taliban (tahl-ee-BAHN) interpretation and implementation of Islamic law draws harsh criticism.

VI. Islam and the West

Many areas of the Middle East do not prize our affluent culture. "[P]eople in the Islamic world genuinely fear...Western materialism and mass culture as a deadly challenge to their Islamic culture and way of life..."

The fact is that our form of materialism can be offensive to devout Muslims—and I do not just mean the extremists among them." (Prince of Wales, “Islam and the West,” p. 19.)

Some Islamists do not reject Western technology, industrial strength and advancement in art and science. Rather, it is when Western consumer values run counter to the purer teachings of Muslim faith that conflict arises.
“Values rejected include excessive consumerism; stress on material gain over moral enrichment; permissive and immoral manifestations, as in pornography, sexual irregularities, abuse of children, lurid enticements of the excessive display of the flesh masquerading as chic or vogue.” (Farah, p. 2)

Dr. Robert Crane accentuates this distinction, applying it to American political ideals.

"[It] is not the real America that is despised in the Arab or Muslim World. America’s republican institutions and traditional values, political freedom and material prosperity, equality of rights and technical proficiency, are all admired.

What is hated is the ugly face that modernism and post-modernism present: the pornography, crime, narcotics, public indecency, polluted culture, ...insulting attitude toward religion." (NS 3300, p. 71.)
Vocabulary List: Fundamentalisms

Consumer values  Negative Western values often imported to the Middle East by new communications technology. Moral permissiveness, crime, narcotics, indecency, polluted culture and secularized attitudes towards religion are often seen as manifestations of consumer values.

Disinherited  The poor, dispossessed, unemployed of a society. Often young, this sub-class seems to have little future. In some Middle East countries, the disinherited are educated but have no jobs available.

Extremists  Fanatics who use their religion for political ends, often advocating terrorism and violence in the process.

Fundamentalism  Emotive label, often categorizing those who would return to the basic, traditional, fundamental elements of their belief or practice. Some fundamentalists can be nonviolent, conservative individuals who seek peaceful change. Others are extremists who advocate violent change.

Militant fundamentalists  Those who see their religion as bringing about revolutionary change in their societies--often through violent means. Also called fanatical extremists, radicals, or renegades.

Modernist Muslims  Those who interpret their faith in terms of modern knowledge. These adherents often accept many Western scientific ideas.

Modernization  Using the scientific and technological methods of the contemporary world to bring about change in society. Within Muslim circles, many accept modernization but reject the Western values which often accompany such change.

Monotheism  Belief in one god

Political expediency  Those who use any means available to accomplish their political ends. Some Middle East leaders use Islam in a pragmatic sense--only to bring about their intended political objectives.
**Politicized Islam** Another term for fanatical extremist practice. Adherents use their religious belief to bring about political ends—often with violent means.

**Quietist** Individuals and groups who advocate peaceful, non-violent, quiet change in their society.

**Religious nationalism** A less emotionally charged term for fundamentalist movements who use religion as their base. The term describes those who apply their religion to promote national/political ends.

**Revivalist Muslims** Individuals who reject Western ideas and call for a return to traditional Islamic ideas.

**Revivalists** Those take their religion seriously, advocating a devout return to the piety and practice of their beliefs.

**Tawhid** (tou HEED) Proclamation of the oneness of God. Tawhid implies as well the inseparability of church and state (religion and politics).

**Westernization** European and American values which often accompany modernization practices. Often the term is seen in a negative light by many Middle East Muslims.
Review Quiz: Fundamentalisms

Part 1--Multiple Choice  Place the most correct response in the blank provided.

1. _____ The term “militant fundamentalist” most readily equates with
   A. moderates.
   B. revivalists.
   C. fanatical extremists.

2. _____ What is NOT a reason for the Islamic resurgence?
   A. Reactions to oil dollars
   B. Appeal of Iran and Afghanistan revolutions
   C. Middle East stability and economic/political constancy

3. _____ The Taliban is a student movement which now controls 70 percent of which nation?
   A. Algeria
   B. Turkey
   C. Afghanistan

4. _____ Western values commonly rejected by Middle East religious nationalists include
   A. Science, learning, and political equality
   B. Permissiveness, moral laxity, consumerism
   C. Technology and communications development

5. _____ The ______________ political response seeks to separate Islam from politics at the nation/state level.
   A. modernist
   B. secularist
   C. fundamentalist
6. ____ What result comes from equating all Islamic fundamentalist movements with extremism?

A. A clear picture of the Middle East arises.
B. A distorted picture arises. Many fundamentalists are not violent, hostile, and prone to terrorism.
C. Understanding of the nuances of Muslim thought and practice are promoted.

7. ____ What is NOT a reason for the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism?

A. Disenchantment with industrialization
B. Response to perceived Western manipulation of the Middle East
C. Sympathetic Western media portrayals of Muslim groups

Part 2--True/False Place a T or F in the blank provided.

1. ____ According to author Judith Miller, militant Islam takes many forms. It is fragmented and diverse.

2. ____ The Islamic revival is another expression of the worldwide resurgence of religion.

3. ____ All Muslim traditionalists are deeply involved in the political processes of their respective countries.

4. ____ Most Muslims worldwide support the Shariah employed by Afghanistan's Taliban.

5. ____ Militant Islam is but a segment of the larger worldwide Muslim community.

6. ____ Many militant Islamists embrace aspects of secularist, modern thought.

7. ____ Many fanatical groups are fluid, everchanging in their views and compositions.
8. _____ There is great variety within Islamic thought and practice.

9. _____ Some Middle East leaders support Islamic renewal for politically expedient reasons.

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Part 3--Matching  Place the letter of the most correct answer in the blank provided.

1. _____ Modernist Muslims  
2. _____ Disinherited  
3. _____ Revivalist Muslims  
4. _____ Political expediency  
5. _____ Westernization  
6. _____ Consumer values  
7. _____ Quietist  
8. _____ Religious nationalism  
9. _____ Militant fundamentalists  
10. _____ Tawhid  
11. _____ Politicized Islam  
12. _____ Extremists  
13. _____ Modernization  
14. _____ Monotheism  
15. _____ Fundamentalism

A. Negative Western values often imported to the Middle East by new communications technology. Moral permissiveness, crime, narcotics, indecency, polluted culture, and secularized attitudes towards religion are often seen as manifestations.

B. The poor, dispossessed, unemployed of a society. Often young, this subclass seems to have little future.

C. Fanatics who use their religion for political ends, often advocating terrorism and violence in the process.

D. Emotive label, often categorizing those who would return to the basic, traditional, fundamental elements of their belief or practice.

E. Those who see their religion as bringing about revolutionary change in their societies--often through violent means. Also
16. _____ Revivalists called fanatical extremists, radicals, or renegades.

F. Those who interpret their faith in terms of modern knowledge. These adherents often accept many Western scientific ideas.

G. Using the scientific and technological methods of the contemporary world to bring about change in society.

H. Belief in one God.

I. Those who use any means available to accomplish their political ends.

J. Another term for fanatical extremist practice. Adherents use their religious belief to bring about political ends--often with violent means.

K. Individuals and groups who advocate peaceful, non-violent, 'quiet' change in their society.

L. A less emotionally charged term for fundamentalist movements who use religion as their base. The term describes those who apply their religion to promote national/political ends.

M. Individuals who reject Western ideas and call for a return to traditional Islamic ideas.

N. Those who take their religion seriously, advocating a devout return to the piety and practice of their beliefs.
O. Proclamation of the oneness of God. Implies as well the inseparability of church and state (religion and politics).

P. European and American values which often accompany modernization practices. Often the term is seen in a negative light by many Middle East Muslims.

“Take a break.”
Sources Used in Fundamentalisms.


Resources for Further Study

Bendroth, Margaret Lamberts, "Fundamentalists and Us," (review of Fundamentalisms Comprehended edited by Martin E Marty and R. Scott Appleby, University of Chicago Press), Christian Century, 22-29 May 1996, p. 575. The author reviews the fifth and last volume of the 'Fundamentalisms Project,' a "worldwide tour of militant, antimodern religious movements." The study provides a broader religiopolitical context in which to see Islamic fundamentalisms.


Hughes, Patrick M., Global Threats to the United States and its Interests Abroad, (Statement for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 22 Feb 1996, Defense Intelligence Agency, [http://www.dia.mil/apr96/001-04-96.html]).


Pelletreau, Robert H., "Dealing with the Muslim Politics of the Middle East: Algeria, Hamas, Iran," (U.S. Department of State Address by assistant Secretary of State before council on Foreign Relations, 8 May 1996, [gopher://gopher.state.gov:...<]).


"Be diligent."