

CHAPTER TWO

SOME IMPORTANT FEATURES OF ISLAM

**THREE ROOTS OF ISLAMIC RESURGENCE 1970 - 1990:
POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES, CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION AND
THE REASSERTION OF IDENTITY**

by

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As a result of numerous global economic, political and social developments in the *1970s* and *80s*, Islamic resurgence has once again become a common feature in Muslim countries worldwide. Esposito writes: "Islam has reasserted itself more forcefully in both the personal and the public lives of Muslim societies in a striking and sometimes dramatic manner often called the Islamic resurgence, Islamic revivalism or Islamic fundamentalism."¹

Any credible political analysis of the Muslim world must include an Islamic perspective, given that Islam has a political world view of its own. Henry Munson Jr. says, "If we wish to understand the political role of a religion, we need to try to understand it as it is understood by the believer."² In this chapter I shall begin by examining the Islamic worldview. I shall show that the Islamic worldview is holistic, covering all aspects of life, including the political realm. Secondly I shall show that the Islamic worldview has (some would say is) a political ideology and a political vision. An aspect of the political vision includes certain idealized objectives that have - and will continue to - inspire Islamic political resurgence throughout the decades.

My main aim, then, is to show that the ideology and the political vision inherent in Islam have played a primary role in contemporary Islamic political resurgence. Indeed, throughout history the Islamic political vision, with its diverse aims and agendas, has acted as a catalyst for political change.

THE ISLAMIC WORLDVIEW

1) Islam and Politics

Religious beliefs can, and do, play varied and important roles in the

1 Islam: The Straight Path. p. 162.

2 Islam and Revolution in the Middle East. p. 7.

development and direction of both national and international politics. Theodore Von Laue, for example, understands the powerful dynamic of religion as a factor in political events when he argues that an "analysis of the inward universe of the individual subconscious as an independent variable in human affairs has barely begun." He continues,

"How much socialization flows from Islamic monotheism, from Buddhist meditation, from Confucianism or Shintoism? What other factors contribute to making religion – the structuring of the inward universe – a politically unifying, power-oriented force."³

The relation between religion and politics in the world today, then, is an important one. In Islam, the political realm is not just one of many arenas in which religious faith is to be expressed; rather it is one of the most important, for it is in politics that religious faith realizes its vision to restructure the world. Donald Smith describes succinctly the essential core of Islamic political philosophy,

"..it would be difficult to exaggerate the intensity with which Islam approaches its mission of establishing on earth a divinely revealed social order... Among the profoundest convictions held by the world of Islam are that there is inherent in the structure of this world and its development a proper course, a right social shape; (and) that the meaning of history lies in the degree to which these become actualized... In these vital respects Islam approaches history with almost the total commitment of Marxism."⁴

In Islamic thought, then, religion and politics are one; there is no separation of life into religious and secular realms. Esposito describes Islam's all-encompassing vision:

"It is not correct... to speak of religion AND politics but instead of religio-politics. Islam is believed to be relevant and integral to politics,

3 The World Revolution of Westernization, Oxford University Press, New York, 1987, p. 375.

4 "The Political Implications of Asian Religions", in South Asian Politics and Religion. Donald Eugelle Smith., ed, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1966, p. 16.

law, education, social life and economics. These are not viewed as secular institutions or areas of life but religious (Islamic), based on the belief that Islam is a WAY OF LIFE, and thus religion and society are interrelated.”⁵

The political force of Islam is founded on its doctrines, which motivate its adherents into taking political action.⁶ Asaf Hussain says, "A commitment to Islam implies politicization."⁷ Watt explains why Islam is a politically oriented faith. "From the time of the Hijra,⁸ the Muslims constituted not merely a religious community but also a body politic."⁹ It is common in Islam, then, to speak of Islam as religion and state (Din Wa Dawla) and as a system of belief and law (Aqida Wa Sharia) that governs' both spiritual and temporal affairs (Din Wa Dunya).¹⁰ In the words of H.S. Bhatia,

"God's law integrates the spiritual and the temporal in the life of the individual, covering with equal authority matters of worship, ritual, ethics and common relations among men, whether they be personal, social, economic or political. By conducting themselves in conformity with this broad scheme of the Sharia, the adherents of Islam can establish a perfect state on earth.”¹¹

5 Islam: The Straight Path, p. 163.

6 See R. Stephen Humphreys, "Islam and Political Values in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria", in Religion and Politics in the Middle East. Michael Curtis, ed., Westview Press, Colorado, 1981. Humphreys says, "When we say that Islam affects politics what do we mean?..Islam may influence political values (and hence political behaviour) on three levels: 1) as a religion strictly speaking...(i.e.) as a system of theological beliefs and transcendently fixed ethical duties; 2) as an ideology; 3) as a symbol of cultural identity. It is the interaction of these three modes of religion which produce a distinctive religio-political orientation" (p. 288).

7 Political Perspectives on the Muslim World, p. xv.

8 See Jamcs Piscatori, International Relations of the Asian Muslim States. University Press of America, Lanham, New York, 1986. Piscatori says, "The Hijrah was the emigration or original exodus of the Prophet and his followers from Mecca to Medina. The year it occurred - 622 - was fixed as the beginning of the Muslim calendar A.H. denotes years in the Muslim calendar" (p. 37).

9 Islamic Fundamentalism and .Modernity, Routledge, London, 1988, p. 89.

10 See Ali Merad, "The Ideologisation of Islam," in Islam and Power, p. 38.

11 Studies in Islamic Law, Religion and Society, p. 94.

2) Islam as an Ideology

Islam is an important force in both national and international politics because it is a political ideology.¹² Siddique says,

"For the Sharia-minded, Islam cannot be encompassed as a 'religion', in the narrow sense of the term, that is, as a set of doctrines binding to the individual. Islam must also be considered as an ideology, as a blueprint for social reality."¹³

Indeed, as Bassam Tibi says, "religions are always also political ideologies."¹⁴ Some random examples show that many Muslims believe Islam to be a comprehensive ideology: In The Economic and Social System of Islam, Anwar Iqbal Qureshi claims that "the best economic and social system is the one provided by the Qur'an", whose teachings he finds more practical than any of the "isms" from the West.¹⁵ G.H. Jansen, another Muslim, writes that "Islam is a polity and a method of governance."¹⁶ The Pakistani government sponsors a body called the Advisory Council on Islamic Ideology. Even a medievalist writer like R.S. Humphreys states that "Islam has always been not only a system of belief but an ideology."¹⁷ Fundamentalist Muslims came to see Islam as "almost a blueprint for a social order which could be set off against capitalism or communism as rival social systems."¹⁸ And finally, in the words of Anwar Ibrahim, a Malaysian fundamentalist leader, "We

12 See Asaf Hussain, Political Perspectives on the Muslim World. According to Hussain, "An ideology is a set of beliefs and ideas through which people view the world." He also says, "Political ideologies focus upon a host of things, such as values, good and evil, the quality of life, distribution of goods and services, freedom and equality" (p. 117).

13 "The Administration of Islam in Singapore", in Islam and Society in Southeast Asia, p. 329. See also Sharon Siddique, "Conceptualizing Contemporary Islam: Religion or Ideology?", in Readings on Islam in Southeast Asia, pp. 337-345.

14 The Crisis of Modern Islam, p. 86.

15 Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1979, p. 7.

16 Militant Islam, p. 17.

17 "Islam and Political Values in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria", in Religion and Politics in the Middle East, p. 292.

18 Hodgson, Venture of Islam, 3:389.

are not socialist, we are not capitalist, we are Islamic.”¹⁹

An ideology is important because it motivates individuals and groups to structure and live their lives according to the values, goals and priorities of that particular system of thought. Esposito notes, "The heart of contemporary revivalism is this ideologization of Islam: Islam is interpreted as a total ideology that provides the basic framework of meaning and direction for political, social, and cultural life."²⁰ To most Muslims, then, Islam - as a religion and culture as well as an ideology - is meant to govern all aspects of their lives (at least ideally), leading them to translate thinking into action. For that reason, as Tibi says, "The critique of ideology should also assume a central place in the discipline of international relations."²¹ Pipes also argues that Islam has an important international role and its ideology, therefore, needs to be understood,

"Events in recent years have made clear the extraordinary role of Islam in world politics. As fundamentalist Muslims took power and achieved international importance in such states as Pakistan and Iran, understanding Islam became necessary to interpret their goals and ideology."²²

Given that ideologies play an important part in political organization and in the structuring of international relationship, it is crucial to fully appreciate the scope and nature of the Islamic political vision. Indeed, past and present political movements and developments in Muslim countries cannot be fully understood if the political ideology of Islam - as a framework of explanation for events - is excluded. As Pipes so aptly notes, "However much institutions, attitudes and customs have changed, the Muslim approach to politics derives from the invariant premises of the religion and from fundamental themes established more than a millennium ago."²³

19 New York Times, March 28, 1980.

20 Islam: The Straight Path, p. 169.

21 The Crisis or Modern Islam, p. 41.

22 In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power, p. 3.

23 Ibid., p. 93.

3) Centrality of the Sharia

One of the most important features of the Islamic political vision - and one which I shall highlight for the purposes of this study - is the centrality of the Sharia in the life and thinking of all Muslims. The Sharia, which literally means "the path", is the primary instrument for building the Islamic socio-political order.²⁴ The primary source of the Sharia is the Qur'an, which contains the basis of the law and some of its provisions.²⁵ Its primary purpose, according to Muslims, is to show mankind the criterion of right and wrong. Considered to be the expression of God's commandments, "the Sharia is a body of authoritative precepts, derived from the principles of divine unity."²⁶ It precedes the State, both logically and in terms of time, and contains the basic law of the Muslim community and the principles of its constitution. By virtue of its divine origin, the Sharia is "the ultimate source of authority in a Muslim state... Its authority is paramount, and is unlimited by any consideration." As Bhatia points out, "It provides both the sanctions and the moral base of the Islamic body politics, hence its sovereignty is established beyond doubt."²⁷

The importance of the Sharia in the politics of the contemporary Muslim world must not be underestimated. Although in practice, it may seem as though many of the quasi-secular elites that govern Muslim nations today have managed to "domesticate"²⁸ and "de-politicize"²⁹ Islam, according to Islamic political philosophy this is only a temporary state of affairs. Religion cannot be separated from

24 See H. S. Bhatia, Studies in Islamic Law, Religion and Society, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1989, p. 94.

25 Ibid., p. 94.

26 Ibid., p. 94.

27 Ibid., p. 95.

28 See Michael Leifer, "The Islamic Factor in Indonesia's Foreign Policy: A Case of Functional Ambiguity," in Islam in Foreign Policy, Adeed Dawisha, ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983. Leifer says, "during the course of Guided Democracy political Islam was domesticated" (p. 147).

29 See Ruth McVey, "Faith As the Outsider: Islam in Indonesian Politics", in Islam in the Political Process, James Piscatori, ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983. In Indonesia, for example, "the prime objective" of Suharto's New Order regime, "has always been to prevent the mobilization of Islam as an independent source of political power" (p. 207).

politics as religion in the Western world has been.³⁰ Islam is concerned not only with the believer's salvation in the Akhira (after-life) but also with the general welfare of Muslim societies in this world.³¹

4) Unity of the Umma worldwide

Another important feature of the Islamic political vision is that it encompasses the whole Muslim world. To the majority of Muslims, the Islamic world is united, not primarily by geographical location, cultural, economic or social ties, but rather by its religious (and therefore political) links. The religious-political links of Islam are important because they transcend national boundaries. Muslims, wherever they are, see themselves as part of the Umma (or the worldwide body of believers), and this shapes their political vision.

"Man's vocation...is to surrender, to submit and realize or carry out God's will. Man...is God's representative or viceregent (Qur'an 2:30, 6:125) whose divinely mandated vocation is to be God's instrument in establishing and spreading an Islamic order, God's rule of earth...The Muslim community (Ummah) is to be the principle vehicle for the realization of God's will."³²

The notion of a global Islamic political community is thus an important one. As a "normative international structure which serves both as a religion and a complete way of life for its adherents", it influences the way that Muslim societies are organized, and helps to determine their political agendas. For one thing, the political organization of Muslim communities is to take place with the establishment of an Islamic "order" in mind. Hussain notes, "The Umma must not be internally divided, but must be integrated through a feeling of brotherhood, and especially through positive political

30 See John Esposito, Islam: The Straight Path. Esposito argues that the contemporary resurgence of Islam in Muslim politics cannot be fully understood without recognizing the tendency in the West to separate religion and politics and to presuppose that secularization is the only option available for today's modern state (p. 162).

31 Political Perspectives on the Muslim World, p. 167.

32 Islam and Politics, p. 2.

action to establish an egalitarian Islamic order.”³³ And secondly, political institutions are to be structured so that the Umma can participate fully in the political processes. "Political structures are necessary so that the Umma can exercise political authority, and such authority must be in accordance with the Sharia.”³⁴

5) Diversity Within Islamic Politics

The role that Islamic ideology plays in the politics of Muslim countries has varied throughout history, depending on the socio-political situation in a particular nation at any one time. The ideology of Islam must therefore be interpreted and applied within the context of a specific country or region.³⁵ How that is then meant to facilitate the design of specific political structures, however, is not specified in Islam, as Bhatia explains.

"All that would be required of an Islamic state is the embodiment in its constitution and practice of those clear cut and unambiguous ordinances of Islam which have a direct bearing on the community's social, political and economic life. As it happens, those ordinances are very few and very precisely formulated; and they are invariably of such a nature as to allow the widest possible latitude to the needs of any particular time and social conditions...Once these few and insistent demands of the Sharia are met, the most diverse forms of government in agreement with time and place are permissible.”³⁶

The result of such ambiguities concerning the structure of the ideal Islamic polity is

³³ Political Perspectives on the Muslim World, p. 1.67. See also Bert De Vries, "Theocracy in Islam", in Islam in the Contemporary World. Cyriac K. Pullapilly, ed., Crossways Books, Indiana, 1980. De Vries says, "To many serious Muslims the life of Islam is not complete until it is manifest in an Islamic community in the political sense as it was in the Middle ages" (p. 82).

³⁴ Political Perspectives on the Muslim World, p. 167

³⁵ H.S. Bhatia., Studies in Islamic Law, Religion and Society. Muslims recognize the need for ijtihad (reflection) to discover the political form or structure that is most appropriate at any given time. Bhatia says, "our right to independent ijtihad on the basis of (the) Qur'an and Sunnah is not only permissible but mandatory, and particularly so in matters on which the Sharia is either entirely silent or has given us no more than general principles" (p. 97).

³⁶ Ibid., p. 97.

that there exists a great diversity in the nature of Islamic resurgence, its actors, organizations, political approaches and methods. The two most common approaches to Islamic resurgence, noted by Esposito, are---1) "a traditionalist desire to restore an early Islamic ideal", and 2) "a reformist call for renovation or reconstruction through Islamic, as distinct from Western reform."³⁷ Despite the fact that their meanings and methods vary, however, traditionalists and reformists alike advocate a return to Islam.

6) Islam and Political Assertion

Political activism or reassertion was a common feature of the Islamic resurgence taking place throughout the Muslim world in the 1970s and 80s. Mohammed Ayoob, for example, describes Islamic political thought as "The politics of Islamic reassertion."³⁸ One of the main reasons for the assertiveness of many Muslims involves a belief in the applicability of Sharia law to all areas of society. Esposito writes, "Whatever the differences in orientation and agenda, central to Islamic revivalism throughout the Muslim world has been the demand for more Sharia law."³⁹ Another reason involves the perception - because of colonialism and imperialism - that the West, in particular, has always had hostile intentions toward the Islamic world.⁴⁰ "Many Muslims now see colonialism as a continuation of the aggression of Christians against the Islamic world begun by the Crusades."⁴¹ This perception of a world hostile to Islam has also become entrenched in the minds of many Muslim university students as a result of their study of history in the West.⁴² That the Islamic community is politically assertive is an important feature, especially

37 Islam: The Straight Path, p. 178.

38 See Mohammed Ayoob, The Politics of Islamic Reassertion, Croom Helm, London, 1981.

39 Islam: The Straight Path, p. 185.

40 See M. Watt, Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity, p. 98. See also C. Ernest Dawn, "The Islamic World and the West Today", in Islam. in the Contemporary World. Cyriac K Pullapilly, ed., Cross Roads Books, Indiana, 1982. Dawn says, "Today, as at the beginning of the century, the Islamic world appears to be mobilized for a great struggle against Western imperialism. The centre, the heart and the brain of imperialism is perceived to be the United States" (p. 101).

41 Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity, p. 98.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

when combined with a vision of an international Islamic polity.⁴³

There are many other explanations for the political assertiveness of contemporary Islamic societies. First of all however, it must be remembered that to a significant degree the evolution and direction of Islamic resurgence is shaped by historical factors. When Islamic militancy erupts in one region - as in Iran - there are repercussions in other parts of the Muslim world. The Iranian revolution became a model for other Shi'ite Muslim groups to emulate. Another important external factor continues to be the Arab-Israeli conflict. Islamic militants have used the Arab military impotence vis-a-vis Israel as a "powerful weapon in their propaganda attack on virtually all Arab leaders."⁴⁴ Two other reasons for the political assertiveness of contemporary Islamic societies include Muslim frustration and anger at continuing American support for Israel and disillusionment with pro-American Arab elites. In addition, "The U.S. military relationship with Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia is also seen as the imposition of permanent military inferiority on the Arabs against Israel, coupled with unwelcome U.S. economic and cultural influences."⁴⁵

One of the most important - and yet often overlooked - factors in contemporary Islamic political resurgence, however, involves the ideological orientation or perspective of the Islamic religion itself. According to a traditional view in Islam, for example, the world is divided into two realms or distinct groups that are in a state of perpetual conflict. The Umma (community of believers) belongs to the Dar AI-Islam (Home of Islam) while non-believers belong to Dar AI-Harb (House of War).⁴⁶ The two may peacefully co-exist if the latter makes no attempt to destroy

43 See Daniel Pipes, In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power. "How Muslims feel and act has enormous international repercussions: they number about 832 million strong and make up roughly one-fifth of mankind, substantial groups of Muslims live in ninety-one countries and in them constitute a population of about 3.6 billion. Muslims control most of the oil available for export and they inhabit many of the globe's most strategic areas. Yet the question of Islam in politics has been given very little serious thought until recently and remains a largely obscure topic in the Western world" (p. 4).

44 See Hrair Dekmejian, Islam in Revolution, p. 165.

45 Ibid., p. 165.

46 Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity, p. 16. See also Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam in the Islamic world Today", in Islam in the Contemporary World, Cyriac K Pullapilly, ed., Crossroads Books, Indiana, 1980, pp. 2-3.

the Dar Al-Islam.⁴⁷ If it does, then the doctrine of Jihad (struggle, or Holy War) "legitimizes offensive and defensive measures to safeguard the political sanctity of Islam."⁴⁸

Jihad is an important concept in Islam. In its most general sense and application in Muslim life, Jihad refers to the attempt to strive as believers to realize God's will and to lead a virtuous life.⁴⁹ In that sense it is an inner struggle against all that prevents the Muslim as an individual from living according to God's will. The other side of Jihad, however, is that it also refers to an external struggle against unbelievers, as "an obligation" and "mission" to "spread God's will and rule."⁵⁰ Among fundamentalists Jihad against unbelief and unbelievers is increasingly promoted as a religious duty. All "true" believers, therefore are obliged to combat anti-Islamic governments and their supporters everywhere. The radical activists, as Esposito notes, believe that this conflict is a spiritual one, "The army of God is locked in battle or Holy War with the followers of Satan."⁵¹ Relations with non-Muslim nations or groups, therefore, tend to be characterized in the Muslim mind as a continuing state of warfare.

Given the potency of the concept of Jihad in both Muslim and non-Muslim thinking, it is understandable that controversy and misunderstanding would accompany its proclamation. Certainly it is a concept that has been misused and misinterpreted not only by some leaders in the Muslim world who have recognized its power to

47 Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity. Watt argues, "The perception of the world as hostile to Islam goes back to before the Hijra. Many of the earliest passages of the Qur'an are critical of the attitudes and practices of the Meccan merchants, and the latter took up a hostile position towards Mohammed and his followers. After the Hijra and the attacks by Muslims on Meccan caravans, the hostility received a military expression. Thus the last ten years of Mohammed's life can be characterized as a military struggle against opponents" (p. 98).

48 Ibid., pp. 98-102. See also Abdullah S. Schleifer, "Understanding Jihad: Definition and Methodology", in The Islamic Quarterly, Vol. XXVII, Number 3, 1987.

49 See J. Esposito, Islam and Politics. Second edition, Syracuse University Press, N.Y., 1987, p. 10.

50 Ibid., p 10.

51 Islam: The Straight Path, p. 171.

mobilize Muslims against the perceived "enemies of Islam"⁵² but also by Western writers preoccupied with an Islamic "monolith." Despite its misuse, however, the concept of Jihad does reveal, that central to Islamic political thinking is a belief in the legitimacy of force to achieve religiously defined goals,

"Traditionalist Muslims, and many others as well, hold that the right of a Muslim to observe the practices of his religion should be defended by force of arms if necessary...The place of the Jihad or 'Holy War' in Islamic thought must also be looked at."⁵³

Given the sanctioning of force for the accomplishment of religiously defined goals, Muslim resurgence often manifests itself in militant political activism, and sometimes terrorism.⁵⁴ Political activism - often considered to be a divinely led enterprise by radicals in the Muslim world - becomes one that all Muslims are enjoined to participate in (although certainly not all do).

Summary

In summing up, then, Islam is a religion with a political ideology and vision. Its motivating power is based upon the important belief that, as a world view, it is a bridge linking this world with the next, "Islam claims that it is the final religion, and that it contains in the Qur'an and the Sunnah all the essential religious and moral

52 Saddam Hussein, in the Gulf War of 1991, for example, pronounced his struggle against the Western allies a Jihad, possibly to ensure the support of the Muslim world. Other Muslim leaders (Eg. Saudi Arabia) had already pre-empted him saying that those Muslims who fought against Iraq were participating in the "true" Jihad. Some Muslim writers highlight the paranoia about Jihad that has preoccupied Westerners writing about contemporary Islamic political assertion recently. See especially Mohammed Ayoob The Politics of Islamic Reassertion, Croom Helm, London, 1981. For an in-depth study of Jihad see, S. Abdullah Schleifer, "Understanding Jihad: Definition and Methodology", in The Islamic Quarterly, Vol XXVII, Number 2, 1987, and "Jihad and Traditional Islamic Consciousness", in The Islamic Quarterly, Vol. XXIII, Number 2, 1983.

53 Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity, p. 99.

54 See G. H. Jansen., Militant Islam. See also Daniel Pipes, "Fundamentalist Muslims Between America and Russia", in Foreign Affairs, Volume 64, Number 5, 1986. Pipes refers to Umar at-Talmasani in Ash-Shab, Cairo, July 9, 1985, who implies that "violence is a legitimate tactic for preventing close relations with either superpower" (p. 941). For a detailed study of some Islamic terrorist groups see Amir Taheri, Holy Terror, Adler & Adler, Maryland, 1987. See also Noel O'Sullivan, Terrorism, Ideology and Revolution, Wheatsheaf Books Ltd, Sussex., 1986, and John Laffin, Holy War: Islam Fights, Grafton Books, London, 1988.

truth required by the whole human race from now until the end of time.⁵⁵ The Islamic worldview is holistic, involving the application of Islamic law (Sharia) to all parts of life, including the political realm. Muslims view the transformation of their societies - using the Koran as the guide - as a divinely mandated task that they are to pursue down through the ages. Political resurgence - using force if necessary - is a necessary (and honourable) task to many Muslims, and it is often explained in terms of specific political goals or idealized states of affairs. As I have shown, Islam as a religion and worldview contains within it (or presupposes) certain politico-ideological goals. The Islamic (or Sharia) state is one and the worldwide religio-political unity of the Muslim community (Umma) is another. In the next three chapters I shall focus on these - and other - features of the religion of Islam, showing how and why they were prominent in Muslim resurgence in the 1970s and 80s.

⁵⁵ Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity, p. 6.