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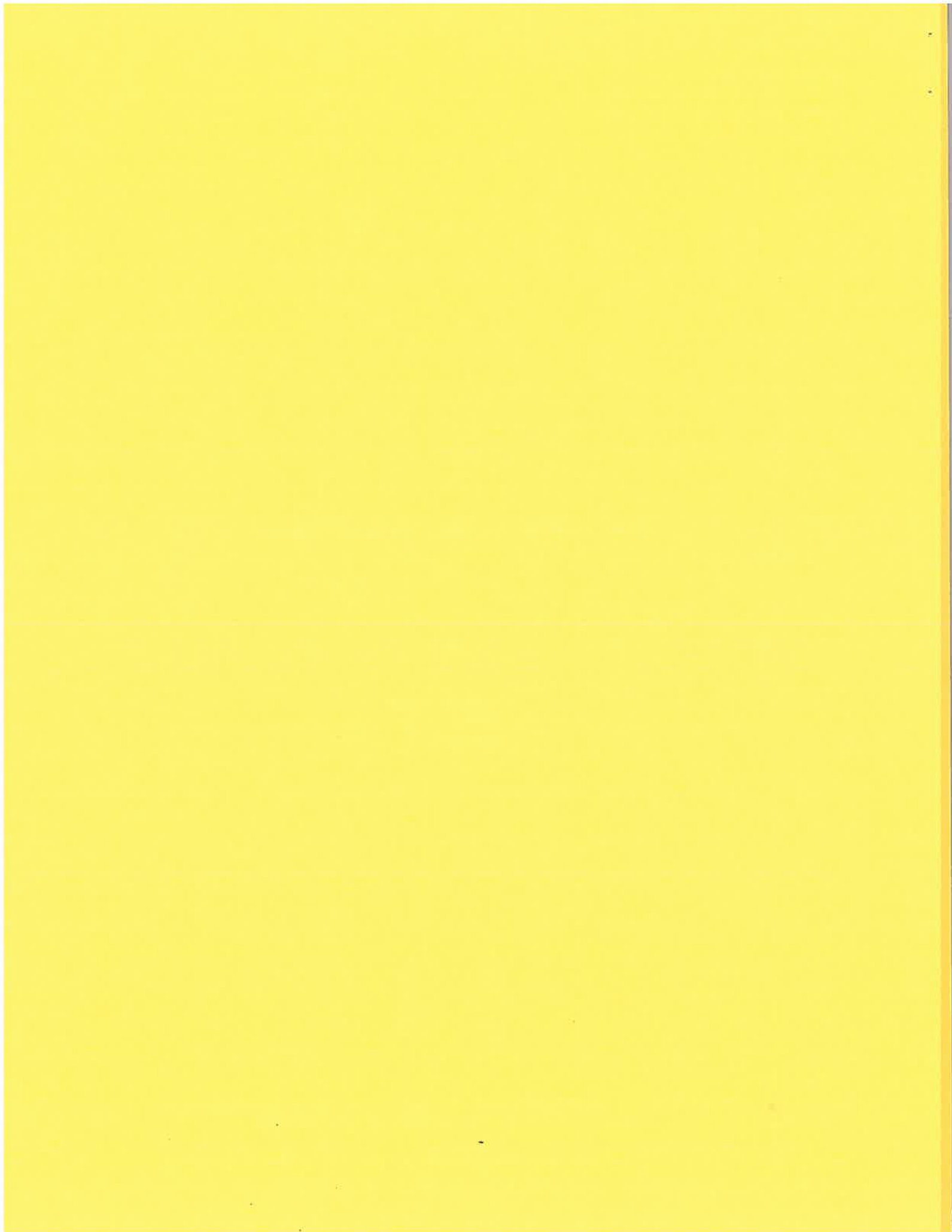
THE RISE OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

by

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Islamic fundamentalism is as old as Islam itself. Throughout Islamic history, fundamentalism has been the movement that acted against what was perceived as the loosening of ethical values and the deviation of governments from true Islamic laws. In doing so, fundamentalism usually tends to resent social change and oppose governments which do not hold Islam in high esteem.

The term Islamic fundamentalism, as it came to be known in the last hundred years, means an attempt to induce Islamic societies to return to the true teachings of Islam. Such a return is meant to be both a means to build a pure Islamic society and a vehicle to effect the desired socio-economic and political changes. Impoverished and illiterate Moslems in particular perceive fundamentalism as a perfect alternative to other systems in which they have little or no stake at all.

This paper will attempt to review the history of the new wave of Islamic fundamentalism and identify its major causes. Since other religions have also experienced fundamentalism, the paper will try to look beyond the Islamic world in order to investigate some of the movement's implications and, hopefully, place it in its right historical context.

Historical Background

The revival of the current wave of fundamentalism can be traced back to the Al-Salafiyya movement, which was influenced intellectually by two Islamic reformers: Jamal El-Din Al-Afghani and Mohammad Abdo. Both reformers started their movements at Al-Azhar University in Cairo and were deeply disturbed by the encroachment of the European powers on the Islamic countries. The message which they preached was that Moslem societies faced the threat of complete cultural and political domination by Europe (1). To preserve their Islamic identity and resume contribution to world civilization, Al-Afghani and Abdo maintained, Moslem societies needed to reform themselves and stem the tide of political and social disintegration. Thus, from the start, fundamentalism was a reaction to foreign encroachment, political disunity, moral degeneration, and Islamic decline.

The Al-Salafiyya doctrine of Islamic reform was based on the conviction that Islam serves the dual role of religion and state. thus it is capable of reconstructing the solidarity, cohesiveness, and vitality which characterized ~~the~~ Islamic society during the first five centuries of Islamic civilization. The movement appealed to Moslems everywhere to use the accomplishments of the first Moslem generation as a model through which the legitimacy and effectiveness of contemporary practices and institutions could be reexamined and evaluated (2). Despite the fact that these ideas found a wide and receptive audience, they achieved neither the revival of Islam nor the end of Western encroachment. The

continuation of Turkish rule over most of the Arab world and the increasing interaction between the West and most Islamic countries, particularly Egypt, Turkey, and Iran, gave rise to nationalism and other secular ideas such as the separation of the state and religion.

As a result, the second generation of Islamic reformers moved toward nationalism and began to advocate selective emulation of contemporary Western models as basis for changing the existing social, political, and economic structures. Borrowing from Europe during this phase "was necessitated by considerations of power, first in terms of military organization and later in terms of administrative and political reforms. These were, in large part, measures of self-defense which were considered compatible with both the Sharia (Islamic law) and the interest of the community."

(3)

The end of World War I was marked by the dismantling of the Turkish empire and the division of the Arab world among the victorious European allies. The upsurge of nationalism in Turkey in the wake of its defeat induced the new Turkish leadership to concentrate on building a modern state based on the Western model of democracy and capitalism. Arabs, on the other hand, were forced by the circumstances to change their priorities, as their attempt to introduce liberal democracy to a unified Arab world was frustrated by the provisions of the post-war settlements.

The imposed division of the Arab national homeland into zones of foreign influence shattered the Arabs' sense of national integrity. "The shock was even more traumatic when they realized

that their aspirations of complete independence were no longer attainable. Under these conditions, the cautious Arab quest for a modern political process no longer concentrated on the system of government, but on two precepts that initially determined the nature of the Arab national struggle: Arab independence and the unity of the Arab homeland." (4)

Other Moslem countries such as Iran and Afghanistan were also engaged in reforms based on the Western model. Pakistan and Indonesia, which became independent states after the end of World War II, used religion as a vehicle to mobilize the masses and gain national independence. Each Islamic country, therefore, was going its own way using Islam, nationalism, and the Western model to reconstruct its own society and build a modern state. After attaining independence, Arab countries followed the same path. Thus, the post-World War II era witnessed the formalization of the fragmentation of the Islamic world and, as a consequence, Islamic unity became something of the past.

Though the Arabic language, the language of the Quran, was instrumental in creating a common denominator among the Moslem people, it did not alter the reality that the component regions of the Islamic world were different in many other aspects. Each has a special history, usually dating back to the great civilizations of the pre-Islamic era. There were also differences in geography, language, local customs and traditions, and socio-economic and cultural orientation (5).

Ultimately, nationalism, which was more concerned with foreign domination and more inclined to emulate Western

institutions of government, became the principal political force dominating the lives of most Islamic countries. Islamic ideals and legacy, however, continued to be cherished and used as an inspirational force in both the fighting for complete national independence and the preservation of national identity. Arab nationalists, for example, tend^{ed} to think of Islam as a national heritage and to view the great cultural and scientific achievements of the Islamic civilization during the Middle Ages as a product of the Arab genius. In contrast, the Moslem masses continued to think of Islam not only as a treasure of the past but also as the body of knowledge that engulf^{ed} their lives and determin^es their future.

On the other hand, foreign domination and the national struggle for political and economic independence has had a profound impact on the Moslem people, especially the intelligensia^t. Increased interaction with the West and the utilis^{ation} of modern science and technology in the quest for achieving national goals served to transform the intelligensia's^t view of itself and its relation to the traditional Islamic leadership. The quest for national independence and modernization consequently caused the role of Islam in shaping the socio-political and educational aspects of the future to recede.

However, the emergence of Jewish Zionism as a foreign power, which threatened and ultimately conquered Palestine, posed a serious challenge to both Islam and Arab nationalism. While the occupation of Palestine denied most Palestinians the right to live in their homeland, the occupation of Jerusalem brought the Islamic

holy places of the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque under the control of a foreign, non-Moslem power. The question of Palestine and the commitment to liberate Jerusalem became the most important issues in the lives of most Moslems everywhere. They motivated the Arab masses, inspired the believers, and provided most Islamic regimes with a new source of legitimacy.

The Reemergence of Islamic Fundamentalism

By the mid-1960's it became evident that the ideas that led the nationalist regimes and the ideals that motivated the masses to support them had failed to achieve their objectives. Internally, the changes instituted by nationalist governments had served to undermine the basis of the traditional Moslem society while denying the masses the opportunity to participate in the shaping of their own future. Externally, foreign domination continued to exert more pressure while Israel was growing stronger and more arrogant and adventurous. Other changes were also seen as posing a serious threat to the cohesiveness and moral values of the Moslem society in general and the Arab society in particular.

The sudden influx of wealth which the oil boom generated served to accelerate the process of social change in most Islamic countries and thus ^{to} accentuate the disintegration of traditional life. Urbanization, modernization, and the introduction of foreign labor and Western consumer goods created a sense of fear, suspicion, alienation, and loss of direction. The concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a small group of merchant and ruling families and at times a military elite added to the

malaise. The collaboration of some Islamic governments with the West, which had assumed the responsibility for the establishment and maintenance of Israel, was seen as a means to facilitate the implementation of Western designs in the Moslem world and to preserve the existing governments which have failed their constituencies and religion.

In the wake of Arab defeat at the hands of Israel in 1967 it was conceded that the existing systems of government and political thought had not only failed but also led to the distorting of Islamic thought and values. Nationalism, which replaced the old Islamic institutions for more than 50 years, had failed to solve the political and economic problems which continued to persist and deepen. In addition, it had also failed to provide specific answers to the questions of legitimacy, political succession, economic development, political freedom, and social justice. In fact, legitimacy and social justice became words devoid of any meaningful interpretation. The abolishment of the Caliphal sovereignty with the dismantling of the Turkish empire, and the failure to establish the principle of popular sovereignty in its place made legitimacy vulnerable to challenge from any group that could muster enough power, regardless of convictions, objectives, or popular support.

After the Arab defeat, the ruling elite took to avoiding responsibility by an outright denial of the true nature of the defeat and to reject accountability through long-winded assertions of innocence. The claim of innocence on the part of the intellectuals who were either supporters or members of the

establishment, and the fear of governments' retaliation on the part of the others turned the intellectuals' silence into an irresponsible passivity. And thus no answers for the defeat were provided and no programs to overcome the new dilemma were formulated. Issues of great popular concern were neither debated nor addressed.

In the Moslem world today there exists no true public opinion which could seriously influence political action or determine public policy. The only real effective agencies of political control are the three major organized forces of the state: the army, the administrative bureaucracy, and the secret service. "The bureaucracy gradually came to represent the permanent apparatus by which political power was bolstered and through which it was exercised; and the army the instrument through which political power was seized and maintained." (6) The secret service gradually emerged as an effective tool of repression through which acts of well-intended dissent and opposition were either silenced or eliminated.

By their very nature police states are incapable of detecting social change until reality is overtaken by crisis. Even when the crisis finally arrived in 1967, Arab governments felt overwhelmed by events they could not foresee. Feeling insecure and inept, governments sought neither the sanction of the religious leadership nor the cooperation of the intelligentsia, and in general they tended to deny both groups the benefits of social and material change. As a result other forces had to take the initiative and assume the leadership role which the events of the

crisis had rendered weak and vulnerable.

Such forces concluded that the true Islam must be rejuvenated as a living religion and a viable institutional framework. This process was viewed by the faithful as a duty that has long been neglected or impeded by the ruling class and a task that must be undertaken if the Moslem world was ever to face outside challenges and threats. Such threats were perceived as emanating from Western hegemony, Israeli expansionism, and Eastern communism. The secular intelligensia^t, being frustrated and marginalized by the existing system, became either active proponents of change for the sake of change, or a passive and bewildered minority having nothing to lose and nothing to gain by getting involved. Since it did not share the fundamentalist movement's vision, it failed to support it; and because it rejected the existing order, it could not oppose the forces which were trying to change it. In fact, support for fundamentalism by the intelligensia^t would have been construed as hypocrisy, and opposition to it would have been interpreted as defense of the status quo.

Fundamentalism, as noted earlier, has always been present as an underlying force that helped preserve Islamic identity and traditions. Therefore, its current resurgence should be viewed in the light of the circumstances that motivated the faithful to become more active and to seek the establishment of an "Islamic Society." Saad Eddin Ibrahim identified these circumstances in the form of six crises: (7)

A PERSONAL CRISIS reflected in the fact that most active fundamentalists are young people suffering from an identity

crisis, and hence are vulnerable to dogmatism;

A SOCIETAL CRISIS reflected in the fact that what makes Islamic societies unique is being eroded, and what is being imported from the West in terms of cultural values is alien to Islam and its cherished traditions;

A POLITICAL CRISIS reflected in the absence of genuine political participation by the people, and a feeling that the rulers are not acting in the best interest of the community but rather in their own best interests and oftentimes in the interests of their foreign benefactors;

A SOCIAL CRISIS reflected in the fact that the distribution of wealth and power was inequitable and the tremendous income generated by oil exports was spreading social corruption and causing moral decay;

AN ECONOMIC CRISIS reflected in the failure of the society to perform credibly in terms of economic development;

A NATIONAL CRISIS resulting from humiliation perpetuated by foreign powers, particularly Israel which continues to occupy Jerusalem and deny the Palestinians their legitimate rights.

In addition to the above, two other crises must be noted:

An IDEOLOGICAL CRISIS reflected in the failure of secular nationalism to articulate a popular program for socio-political and economic change and to create the appropriate institutions to implement it; and

AN INTERNATIONAL CRISIS reflected in the fact that both the free enterprise system and the Communist system, the two major ideologies competing for world dominance, have failed to live up

to expectations; and, in the pursuit of "national interests," superpower competition has contributed to deepening political instability in most Third World countries.

In its relations to the Moslem world in general and the Arab region in particular, the West has followed a policy based solely on the strategic importance of the region, and thus it ignored its history, its people, and the aspirations they nurtured. To the West the management of strategy and resources, as the latest involvement in the Gulf war has vividly demonstrated, prevails over the understanding of national dignity. To preserve perceived interests, Western policy makers used manipulation, coercion, and at times military force either directly or by proxy to suppress Arab aspirations and distort Moslem image.

In the wake of Arab defeat and the failure of the Islamic regimes to face the challenges posed by it, it was concluded that an alternative must be sought and activated. Islamic fundamentalism claims to provide that alternative and to offer a clear ideology that can deal with existing dangers and face foreign threats. And because Israelis continue to enjoy the support of the West in general, the Arab defeat was viewed as a continuation of the traditional confrontations between Islam and Western civilization. Consequently, it became only natural that the new Fundamentalist movement adopt an anti-establishment, anti-West, and anti-Israeli stand.

The humiliation of the defeat injured the pride of the Arab nation, and nations whose pride is injured tend to get angry and seek revenge. Thus the defeat and its consequences provided the

right combination of circumstances for the revival of religious fundamentalism and the proliferation of political radicalism. And in view of the regimes' inability to bridge the gap between reality and aspirations action became imperative and confrontation inevitable.

While most Moslems everywhere tend to believe in fundamentalism, only a small minority go beyond belief and act to change the existing order to conform to its vision. Therefore, "fundamentalism and radicalism is not a monolithic entity." (8) Radical acts and positions, which a small minority has often exhibited, do not reflect a strategy for the fundamentalist movement and thus must be viewed only as a loud and sometimes desperate political statement. It is a statement made by an angry minority on behalf of an oppressed majority whose grievances and aspirations have long been ignored and neglected.

In Iran and later on in Lebanon, the Western social and political challenge was so powerful and pervasive that it generated a strong and uncompromising response. The Iranian response was motivated by a cultural challenge that threatened the Islamic identity of the nation and eroded the leadership role of the clergy. The Lebanese response, which was precipitated by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, came as a result of the ~~age~~ old policy of deprivation of and discrimination against the poor by the West and the rich and powerful Lebanese class. In fact, almost all radical acts committed by the fundamentalist movement came in the wake of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and sought to take revenge on those foreign powers which had constantly backed

the privileged Lebanese class and repeatedly humiliated the Arab world. In most Islamic countries today, fundamentalism is the most attractive movement appealing to the politically subservient, the economically exploited, the socially frustrated, and mostly to those who are in search of a cultural identity.

Objectives and Prospects

During the last two hundred years, Islamic civilization underwent a stage of new awakening as exemplified by the following movements of Islamic fundamentalism: the Wahhabi movement in Saudi Arabia, the Sanousi in Libya, the Mahdi in Sudan, the Ahmadiyya in India, the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt, Khomeinism in Iran, and the Amal movement in Lebanon. All of these movements have arisen as a result of what had been perceived to be the need to stem the tide of moral deterioration and political disintegration in the Moslem world. And that could be achieved, the fundamentalist leadership maintained, through the building of a new Islamic society where the Shari'ah is strictly observed and in which all Moslems would be bound together as brethren.

The basic creed of Islam is that God (Allah) is the source of all truth and that his very words were revealed to his prophet Mohammed in the Quran. The Shari'ah comprises a code of ethics, a code of religious and civil practices, a system of law, and a form of political and economic organization. It calls upon all Moslems to adhere to it, to defend their religion, and to spread the word of God among other nations. Thus, Islam is not merely a set of religious beliefs but also a way of life that tends to

regulate the individual's behavior and govern his relationships to God, to his neighbors, to his community, and to the world at large.

On the other hand, Islamic fundamentalism is a vision that derives its inspiration from the qualities of the Islamic society which the prophet Mohammad and his immediate successors had established. Fundamentalist movements are social and political movements whose primary aim is the realization of this vision. As Augustus R. Norton says, the fundamentalist movement today is a multifaceted admixture of parties and societies with a correspondingly diverse collection of goals, programs, motives, and even religious views. What ties members of this movement together is not a party discipline or a formal association but a shared religious and political state of mind (10).

While fundamentalism is a deeply-rooted conviction based on religious beliefs, activism, or radicalism, is a political behavior dictated by the circumstances. Though the first may be open for reinterpretation, it could not be altered or even modified. In contrast, the second is always subject to change as circumstances change. Radicalism, as previously explained, is an act of desperation to draw attention to and underline accumulated grievances. In fact, the resort to violence as a political tactic has always been considered a means that justifies its own ends, especially by the ideologically-oriented marginal strata of society in every society and throughout history.

The Arab defeat in 1967 shocked the Arab masses and caused the loss of confidence in public institutions. Suspicion of

foreigners and passion to maintain Arab identity forced the masses to look inward. And inward they found Islam, which had the answers for the much asked questions. "It offered no strange slogans or complicated alien ideology, no reliance on an outside force that compromised their independence." (11) And because of its simplicity and authenticity, fundamentalism appealed to Moslems everywhere. Since it required no sophistication to understand, no training to practice, and no proven experience to promote, it became an instant success. To most believers, fundamentalism is the true ideology with the right model for social and political transformation and the only source of pride.

However, it is an ideology that offers nothing new or original. It brings no new revelations; it contains no new ideas; it offers no real solutions.

Due to its very nature, the fundamentalist movement tends to distort the reality that it has to deal with and reject other forces of social change which could not and should not be ignored. Efforts aimed at exposing the failure of existing institutions provide no credible alternative and offer no clear vision. Therefore, it became a movement of dissent and rejection rather than a movement of open dialogue and positive engagement.

Since Islamic societies lack the experience to deal with the major issues of our time, such as political democracy, economic development, the freedom of speech, and the ethics of modern science and technology, the movement was doomed to fail. In reality, the attempt to rejuvenate Islam boiled down to a faint attempt to remold the present and shape the future in the image of

a glorious but fading past.

Due to these shortcomings and many others, the movement could no longer maintain its unity or substantiate the claim that it was the right movement to reunite the Islamic world. The passions demonstrated by the followers of some factions in their attempts to challenge the establishment and defy other competing factions led to further political divisions and aroused uncalled for ethnic conflicts. In short, the Islamic fundamentalist movement proved capable of identifying its enemies and pinpointing the issues it stands against. But it failed to cooperate with other forces of social change and to formulate a workable program to realize the goals it advocates.

Following the Arab defeat, however, a number of Arab regimes began to court Moslem conservatives and promote fundamentalists as a counterweight to the other socio-political forces which demanded change and accountability. For that matter, the governments of Tunisia and Egypt encouraged fundamentalists in the early 1970's only to lose control of them by the early 1980's (12). In other Islamic countries the governments tried either to outmaneuver the movement, accommodate it, or challenge it. In Malaysia, Sudan, and Pakistan the governments attempted to outmaneuver the extremists by embracing the Islamization drive as their own. In Jordan, Algeria, Morocco, and Kuwait a policy of accommodation was adopted whereby the population was asked to observe Moslem holidays and to respect Islamic symbols and traditions. Yet other regimes such as the Syrian, Tunisian, and to some extent the Egyptian have chosen to challenge the extremists by undermining

their credibility and restricting their maneuverability. In Indonesia and Iraq, Islam as a religion is being depoliticized, more so in Iraq as a result of the uncompromising position adopted by the Iranian leadership in its senseless war against Iraq.

Since fundamentalists claim to know all the truth which the Quran embodies, they tend to seek total solutions to terribly complicated social and political problems. In doing so, they seem to have little tolerance for hesitation and none for dissent. Governments which are trying to accommodate the movement are in fact, though unintentionally, encouraging the extremists to escalate their demands. Compromise, the art of balancing interests and obligations, goals, and means, is something most fundamentalists find unacceptable.

The impact of fundamentalism, in varying degrees, has been evident in every Islamic country and among all Moslem communities. While the Shari'ah is being observed in only a small number of countries, most peoples and regimes are becoming more respectful of Islamic practices and symbols than ever before. Nevertheless, the future prospects of the fundamentalist movement seem to be uncertain. Many developments and forces are expected to influence the direction of the movement and consequently to affect its future. The success or failure of the Iranian revolution, the ability of the present regimes to live up to expectations, the response of the nationalist intellectuals, and the reaction of the international community to religious conservatism in general should determine the future prospects of Islamic fundamentalism.

The development and direction of Islamic Iran is probably the

most important factor affecting fundamentalism today. While it is a living proof that Islam possesses the ability to mobilize the masses, the financial and political support which Iran has at the same time been lending other fundamentalists has been reinforcing the concept of the brotherhood of all Moslems. As the spokesman for the Moslem opposition party in Malaysia once said, "The victory in Iran gave the fundamentalist movement new spirit that Islam can achieve victory." (13) "If the Iranian revolution succeeds, it will be a motivation. If it fails, it will not dissuade many of the hard core militants from trying again, but it will adversely affect the attraction of Islamic militancy." (14)

The ability of the present regimes in other Islamic countries to cope with the crises that gave rise to fundamentalism in the first place is probably the second most important factor influencing the future of the movement. After the Arab defeat in 1967, Arab intellectuals raised the question of accountability and stressed the need of reevaluating Arab ties with the West and with the Islamic world. Instead of initiating constructive dialogue, Arab governments responded by using their most hated apparatus, the secret service, to stifle criticism and silence opposition. Ever since, the profound transformation which has been taking place in the lives of the Arab people has remained partially understood and hardly attended to.

Changes, taking place in Moslem countries in general and Arab countries in particular, appear to defy analysis. Response to challenges continues to lag behind established facts. Attempts to react to even the most threatening challenges have been formulated

in broad, theoretical terms which lack both the honesty to acknowledge reality and the political will to face it. Things that are alien to the Moslem experience or critical of the performance of the regimes are being either ignored or denounced as the product of some foreign evil forces. Intellectuals, especially liberal nationalists, are being coopted, coerced, or forced to seek refuge in passivity or in countries other than their own.

Arab intellectuals, who believe that Arab unity is the shortest way toward building a strong progressive Arab nation, are still weak and hesitant to face the challenge. Governments in turn seem determined to deny the nationalists the right to establish political parties as a means to interact with the masses. In addition, the strict limits imposed on the press have practically eliminated the opportunity to develop a forum where ideas could be freely expressed, thought promoted, and constructive dialogue started and maintained. If governments stay the course, fundamentalism will gain more strength and will undoubtedly attract more of the disaffected and disenfranchised young people. In fact, most Arab intellectuals who support fundamentalism today do so not out of conviction but as a result of frustration and despair. In such a fertile environment new radical ideas of change are more likely to proliferate, both without the sanction of the governments or the approval of social critics.

Religious fundamentalism today is not a unique phenomenon that prevails in the Moslem world only. From the United States to

China and from the Soviet Union to Morocco, fundamentalism appears to be on the rise. As an international phenomena^{on}, fundamentalism must have its own logic and causes which seem to transcend national borders and cut across various cultures. Therefore, the currency of the universality of this phenomena dictates the need to examine its causes and implications in the context of the communality of human needs, social relations, and national aspirations shared by all peoples. In fact, this wave of religious fundamentalism should be looked upon as a product and primary component of a new phase in human history. This phase, which began to emerge in the mid-1960's, could be called the "Age of Diminishing Expectations."

Fundamentalism and the Age of Diminishing Expectations

Similar to Islam, Christianity and Judaism have experienced religious fundamentalism during the last two decades. In various forms, many other fundamentalist movements have arisen in countries whose predominant religion is neither Islam, Christianity, or Judaism. Religious revivalism in fact has become an international phenomena^{on} whose causes are yet to be determined and whose implications are still being defined and examined.

In times of social stress, societies tend to become more conservative, more protective, and more inward-looking. Fear and dissatisfaction usually drive people to die into their past for safer answers. Values which helped preserve the communal identity and national vitality in the past become new active players in the search for a better tomorrow. Though such values may not be able

to contribute to solving the problems which caused the social stress in the first place, their contribution to easing social stress and calming people's fear is usually substantial and meaningful.

In such times, religion and the moral values it espouses become the major source of individual solace and communal inspiration. Religious fundamentalism becomes a national defense mechanism aimed at preserving the particular. In doing so, fundamentalists try to remold the present in the image of the past and tend to rebuild relationships between individuals and groups more on the basis of ethics and less on the basis of interests.

Thus, to understand the fundamentalist movement and to begin to evaluate its prospects, the major developments which gave birth to this new era of "diminishing expectations" must be identified and examined. Simply defined, the "age of diminishing expectations" is an historical era characterized by a general human presentiment that the future will not promise as much as the past did and a resigned acceptance of what is expected to come.

As mentioned earlier, this era began to emerge in the mid-1960's as a result of the many setbacks suffered by most countries and political ideologies. By the end of the 1970's, the age of diminishing expectations had finally arrived, and its logic had begun to influence the direction of the general development of the world community. Political and economic conservatism, religious fundamentalism, and environmental protectionism became major issues influencing both the present and the shaping of the future.

Developments which led the world community to enter this era are many and varied in nature. Some are political, others economic, and most ideological and cultural in nature.

The apparent failure of capitalism to avoid recurring recessions and inflation, the failure of socialism to close the technological gap that continues to separate the East from the West, and the failure of almost all Third World countries to extend political independence to the sphere of economics exposed the limits of the world's predominant ideologies. In addition, capitalism failed to eliminate poverty despite its magnificent achievements in the fields of economics, science, and technology. Communism failed to provide the political freedom it promised despite its remarkable success in building a powerful military force on one hand and the absence of serious external threats on the other. Third World nationalism failed to eliminate economic and cultural dependency, to provide freedom and political stability, or even to reduce social injustice and income disparities in a meaningful way.

Other examples of the setbacks suffered by many of the leading countries of the world were experienced on the battlegrounds. America's great military contribution to achieving victory and ending World War II was followed by a humiliating defeat in Vietnam a quarter of a century later. Russia's spectacular show of military might and domination in crushing the Hungarian and Czechoslovakian liberal movements in the mid-1950's was followed by a show of military impotency in Afghanistan in the early 1980's. The Israeli army which needed

only six days to defeat the armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in 1967 failed to enter Beirut after having the city encircled, starved, and bombarded for 89 consecutive days. Even the North Vietnamese, who managed to defeat the French empire and the American superpower, have failed to subjugate tiny Cambodia after 15 years of fighting and military occupation. These developments were instrumental in exposing the limits of military power and reducing the feasibility of utilizing such power as a means to achieve other political and strategic objectives.

Furthermore, the energy crises of 1973 and 1979 served to emphasize the concept of interdependence and highlight the West's vulnerability to disruption of energy supplies. The political events of the crises and the financial and economic developments which followed made economic and political dependency a two-way street. The rich and powerful nations turned out to be as dependent on the national resources and markets of the poor and powerless as the poor and powerless nations were dependent on the financial resources and technology of the rich and powerful. While these developments gave the poor and powerless nations a new sense of pride, they also enabled some of them to become active players in the international arena. The rich and powerful nations, on the other hand, began to lose confidence in their ability to control the world and to gradually realize that many of their national goals and communal ambitions were actually beyond reach.

Meanwhile, the communications revolution was making the movement of people, goods, and ideas across oceans and

international borders easier than ever before. As a result, people everywhere became familiar with the living conditions in most other countries of the world and more aware of the shortcomings of other competing social systems and ideologies. For example, the world's rich nations and classes were able to see through television, and at times (to even) experience through travel, the tragic conditions of the world's poor. On the other hand, the world's poor began to realize that material poverty does not always mean human misery as they became aware of the existence of the problems of homelessness, crime, alcoholism, and the uncaring for the poor and elderly in most industrialized countries.

Poverty, military dictatorships, and political instability in the Third World, homelessness, the disintegration of family ties, and the wide spread of crime in the West, and alcoholism, totalitarianism, and the lack of freedom in the East rendered competing social systems and ideologies less appealing, if not unworthy of consideration. Dissatisfaction with one's way of life and the lack of credible alternative systems led people everywhere to expect less in the future and convinced them to accept less as inevitable. Political conservatism and religious fundamentalism became not only two signs of this age but also two of its most active agents.

Setbacks and failures which neither the US nor the Soviet Union was able to avoid, seem to have convinced many people everywhere that both capitalism and communism have lost their claim on the future. As a result, religious fundamentalism, one

of the oldest and most resilient social institutions, rose to take the initiative and claim the future. However, the future it envisions is one that would be built in the image of a past that has never experienced the challenges posed by the present. In addition, the changes which the fundamentalist movement generally espouses are behavior-oriented rather than ideology-oriented. While such changes are more likely to influence the behavioral patterns of many people, especially those patterns considered to be immoral, unethical, or pleasure-oriented, their ability to develop and institute new social systems capable of dealing with the ever increasing human problems are very much in doubt. The lack of new ideas on the one hand and the hashing and rehashing of the past on the other make religious fundamentalism an escape from reality rather than a positive reaction to its challenges -- an illusion rather than a practical solution.

FOOTNOTES

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