

## 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

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- Not all Arabs look favorably upon the West
- Militant extremism may serve as a rallying point for discontented minorities in Middle East

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*"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."*

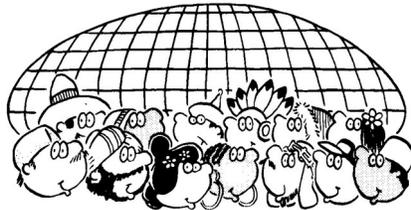
-- Mushahid Hussain, "Cold War Against Islam,"  
Far Eastern Economic Review, 2 July 1992, p. 22.



*"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.*

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### I. Diversity Within Islam



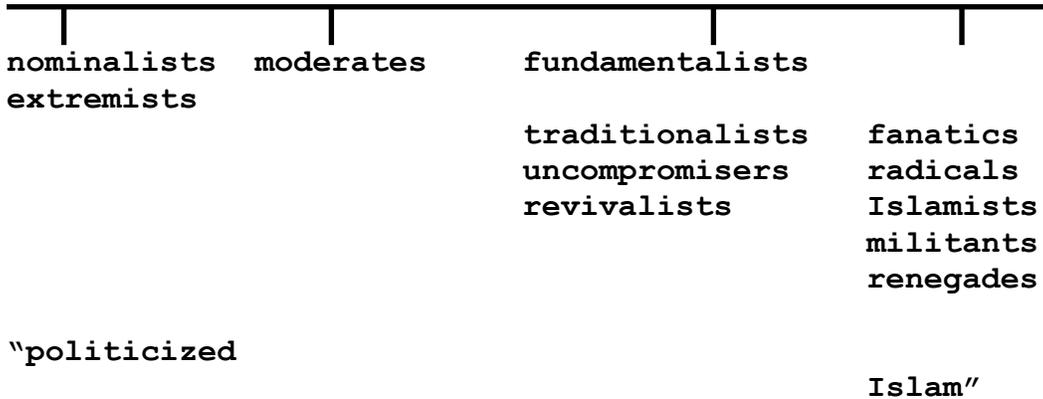
There is no single Islamic voice. Muslims are as diverse as each of the countries in which they live. As with other major religions of the world, the degree and intensity of practice by Muslim adherents varies.

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For clarification, the following chart may assist in plotting various Islamic schools of thought.



Most of the American media attention given Islam focuses on the radical, extremist edge. Such characterizations do not treat the majority of Islamic adherents.

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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.)"*

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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, worldwide resurgence of religious fundamentalism (termed "religious nationalism" by Dr. Juergensmeyer). The University of Minnesota's Caesar Farah agrees.

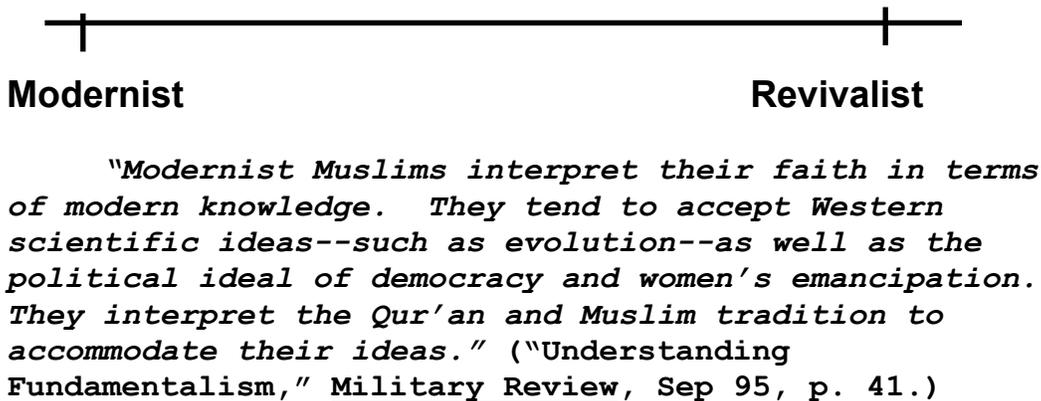
*"Falling back on religion is not unique with Islamists today. [Consider] India's xenophobic Hindu movement, Orthodox Jews in Israel demanding a religious state, Buddhists in east Asia seeking the same end. Catholics in eastern Europe, Latin America and the Philippines, 'all have turned to their faith 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



*"[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*



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..."

