

## Unit 8: Fundamentalisms

### Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will

### Be aware of the following

- Variety within Islamic thought and practice
- Impact of fundamentalist ideology on the Southeast Asia region
- 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
- Selected reasons for the rise of religious nationalism in the late twentieth century
- Selected East Asian views of the West
- Present opportunity and desire of many East Asian peoples to interact with Armed Forces personnel
  - Distinct expression of fundamentalisms in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Brunei and Singapore

### Identify

- Religious nationalism
- Muslim revivalists
- Taliban
- Sangha
- Asian Affirmations
- Dali Lama
- Samuel Huntington
  - Militant Islamists

## Realize

- Militant Islam is but a segment of the larger picture of world-wide Islam
- Resurgence of religion around the world

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*"...around its Central Asian periphery, China must now contend with a bevy of small republics which are open to influence by China's rivals and subject to Islamic fundamentalist ideology which might spill over into China's own Muslim border regions."*

-- Diane Smith, 1997 Strategic Assessment, U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute.

*"The late twentieth century has seen a global resurgence of religions around the world. That resurgence has involved the intensification of religious consciousness and the rise of fundamentalist movements."*

-- Dr. Samuel Huntington, Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, p. 64.

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### I. Worldwide Religious Nationalism

East Asian societies--like many other cultures around the world--are experiencing a resurgence of religion. Though commonly identified with Islam, this return to the "fundamentals" of one's faith is not limited to Muslims alone.



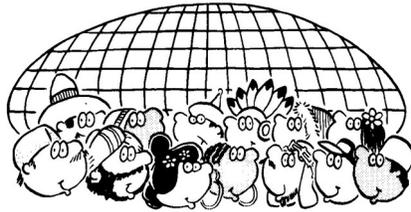
Writes University of Minnesota professor Caesar Farah, *"Falling back on religion is not unique with Islamists today. [Consider] India's xenophobic Hindu movement, Orthodox Jews in Israel demanding a religious state, Buddhists in east Asia seeking the same end. Catholics in eastern Europe, Latin America 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.)

Popular media often links the term fundamentalism, though often a pejorative term, with this revival of religious interest and its application to society. Author Mark Juergensmeyer argues for the more inclusive term "religious nationalism" to replace the emotion laden "fundamentalism." It applies to the fusion of people's religious perspective with their nation's political and social focus. (See The New Cold War, Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State, p. 6)

## II. Fundamentalist Expressions

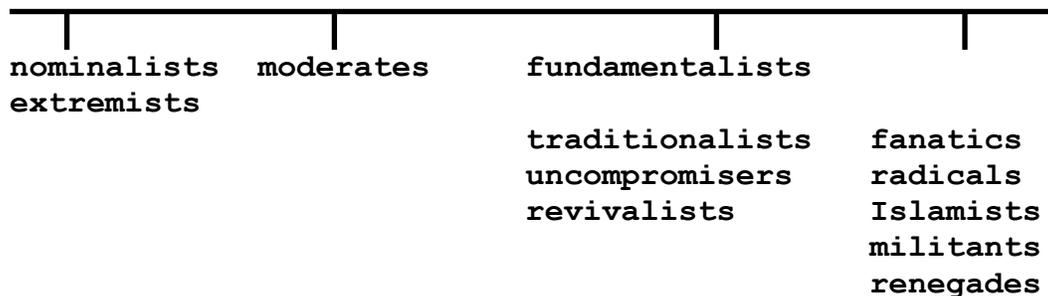
**1. Islam** Before discussing religious nationalist influence (fundamentalist) in Southeast Asia, it is important to capture a broader picture of fundamentalism within Islam.

### a. 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.



'politicized

Islam'

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."*

*But there's a small group of extremists and then a small group of countries, like Iran, that encourage extremism." (18 Nov 96, p. 10.)*

Extremist, radical fundamentalists look beyond the actual meaning of the Qur'an. They reinterpret it for their political purposes. Islam becomes "politicized."

Scholar Seyyed Nasr offers a healthy perspective on the place of "fundamentalist" and "extremist" movements within Islam.



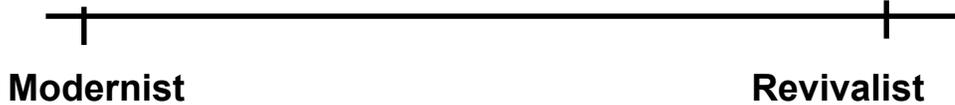
Islam is like a huge mountain. Scarred by geological formations, crevasses, and landslides, these details represent fundamentalist streams of thought. The permanent, solid, unchanging mountain is much more akin to Islam itself. People study and report on the surface activity, often ignoring the vast, solid structure which underlies all. (See Our Religions, p. 515.)



## b. Understanding Islamic Fundamentalism

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

### (1) The Religious Axis



*"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 'quietest' type, which retains traditional religious belief but espouses a less politically active stance." (p. 41.)*





religion and as a vital determinant of ethnic identity and political understanding. The authors see Islam in this region of the world as another expression of the global Islamic revitalization.

*"Southeast Asian Muslims are not remote from events in the wider Islamic community. A major element in the continuing Islamicization process in the region has been the stream of students returning from Islamic universities and training schools in the Middle East and Southwest Asia." (p. 8.)*

The executive summary gives a broad overview of Muslim faith and practice in the region:

*"Although the manifestations differ from country to country, throughout Southeast Asia, the Islamic consciousness of its nearly 160 million Muslims has been raised. This is in part an extension of the global resurgence of the Islamic identity..."*

*The assertion by fundamentalists of the demand for an orthodoxy in which all institutions of society will conform to Islamic law (sharia) is rejected by the incumbent elites of Malaysia and Indonesia as incompatible with the demands of modernization. In Malaysia the strategy has been adaptive accommodation and co-optation. In Indonesia the approach has been to legally "depoliticize" Islam. In both cases, the fundamentalist extreme presents some threat of political violence.*



*In the Philippines and Thailand, the [fundamentalist] problem is one of separatism. In neither case does it appear probable that the maximum goals will be realized. In the Philippines, however, the evolution of Muslim autonomy will be closely connected to the outcome of the wider political crisis. In both Thailand and the Philippines there are possible scenarios of separatist alliance with communist insurgents.*

*The two mini-states of Brunei and Singapore contrast sharply. Brunei is the most thoroughly Islamized state in ASEAN, while the Muslim minority in Singapore is socially and economically disadvantaged.*

*Nowhere in Southeast Asia do we find any real prospect of Islamic fundamentalist seizure of political power in the sense of a clerical wresting of the state from secular leadership. Yet, throughout the region the political culture is being infused with Islamic values.*

*Islam in its 'neomodernist' guise provides an alternative political ideology for the modern state in competition with capitalism and socialism. Great attention should be paid to the linkage between Islam and real social and economic grievances in urban centers in particular." (The Political Impact of Islam in Southeast Asia, Introduction.)*

**2. Buddhism** Within parts of Southeast Asia, the Sangha (Buddhist monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen) possessing the strength of numbers and respected by the laity, increasingly is called upon to exert political influence.

In Myanmar (Burma), frustration aroused by injustice led Buddhist monks to participate in leadership riots and underground revolutionary activity along the Myanmar-Thai border. In Thailand and Cambodia, Buddhist activists have been instrumental in political activity since the early 1990s.

Political leaders in Cambodia and Laos, determining monastic orders (the Sangha) to be either reactionary or hindrances to development, steadily disestablished them during the past twenty years.





The revival of Buddhist influence in Singapore is indicative of resurgence Buddhism in growing economies.

*"By the late 1980s, some Buddhist organizations were winning converts by following the Protestant churches in offering services, hymnbooks, and counseling in English and Mandarin. A Buddhist Society at the National University of Singapore offered lectures and social activities similar to those of the popular Christian Fellowship.*



*Some Chinese secondary students chose Buddhism as their compulsory religious studies subject, regarding Confucianism as too distant and abstract and Bible study as too Western and too difficult. They then were likely to join Buddhist organizations, which offered congenial groups, use of English, and a link with Asian cultural traditions."*

(Library of Congress Country/Area Study)

In China, Buddhist expression serves to bind ethnic Tibetans together. Concern for the potential impact of ethnic separatist movements has led the Chinese government to restrict Tibetan Buddhist practice, including public expressions of reverence to the Dali Lama.

Yet the very interest displayed by Communist officials in Tibetan Buddhism raises consciousness of its increasing impact.

**3. Christianity** In South Korea, Taiwan, and parts of China, both Protestant and Catholic expressions of Christianity offer alternatives to perceived emotionally dry, formalized Confucian practice. In response to late twentieth century cultural anguish, psychological, emotional and social needs are increasingly met--particularly among the young--through interest in Christian belief and practice. In the Philippines and Indonesia's East Timor, the

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involvement of Catholic leadership in liberationist practices receives world-wide attention.

### 3. Fundamentalist Resurgence Author Samuel

Huntington identifies the following three reasons for the causes of the rise of religious nationalism in the late twentieth century.

**a. Modernization** A common notion twenty-five years ago was that the process of modernization would squeeze out desire for the sacred.



Rather than drive people from faith to secularism, however, social, economic and cultural change propels people back to their spiritual/religious frame of reference. Reason and technology cannot supply all answers. The distinctly religious dimension of humankind resurfaces. As urbanization increases--so does desire for community and meaning. Religion meets such need.

**b. Reaction** As a response and counterbalance to secularism, moral relativism, self-indulgence, pollutions, indecency, crime and narcotics, excessive consumerism, stressing the material over the spiritual, interest in religion--especially fundamentalist expressions with clear cut answers to societal ills--resurfaces.

A reaffirmation of community, values, order, discipline, work and mutual assistance all are bolstered by fundamentalist religious underpinnings.

**c. End of Cold War and Retreat of West** Religious belief fills the void left by Communist ideology and secularism. And, Western influence--urbanization, development, industrialization, technology--though strong in the region, has not instilled a similar spiritual infusion.



Relativism, egotism, consumerism and degenerate influence often accompanying Westernization are rejected. The revival of traditional/fundamentalist religious roots fills the need.

**4. East Asian Views of the West** Throughout the region, perspectives of East Asians (who are sympathetic to a religious/cultural "fundamentalism") differ in their assessments of the West. However, the following three viewpoints give a partial interpretation.

**a. Asian Affirmations** As outlined by professor Huntington, industrialization and growth in the East Asian region led to the following attitudes.

(1) **Power** Many East Asians see the rapid economic development plan to continue and soon surpass that of the West. Such economic growth links to an accompanying position of power growth in world affairs.

(2) **Culture** This dimension sees economic success in the regions as a product of the superior Asian culture. Western culture and social decadence takes a distant second place. Asian emphasis upon the collective, rather than individual, is at the heart of her growth.



(3) **Commonalities**

While recognizing differences in cultures and countries of the region, East Asians also argue that a common value system--in the tradition of Confucius--is

honored by many within the area. Thrift, family, hard work and discipline are common, primary shared values.

(4) **Models** Many East Asians argue that non-Western societies need emulate Asian development and values in order to experience growth. To renew itself, the West must take a similar approach. (See The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, pp. 107-109.)

**b. Perceived Moral Decline** Some East Asians, while admiring the West for its technical achievement and competence, nonetheless focus on the perceived cultural and moral decline of the West.



Antisocial behavior as seen in crime, violence and drugs; family decay; decline in voluntary associations and affiliations of interpersonal trust; a weakening work ethic; and lowering of scholastic achievement all bolster assertions of Asian moral superiority.

**c. Individual Association** As outlined by Lt. General Robert Ord, former commander of U.S. Army Pacific Command, now is the day of opportunity.

East Asian peoples want to interact with members of the Armed Forces. The values of the American military are respected in the region.



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Our strength as a defense force, reputation as citizens who embody the noble values of our profession, and our broader mission as proponents of the positive dimensions of American culture all serve to make this a "golden day" for us in the region.

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