

Islamic Fundamentalism: Myth and Reality Confronted?

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Introduction

Language is power, and terms consistently used take on a reality that truth belies. Thus with the term Islamic fundamentalism, which has been bandied about and used lightly and interchangeably with Islamism, Political Islam, Radical Islam, and even Islamic terrorism. But, do they mean the same thing? In much of the literature (including media reports) on Islam and the political activities of certain Muslims, the tendency is to depict the phenomenon of fundamentalism as the spectre of religious fanaticism which gives rise to terrorism, and in the process induces fear of Islam, the religion. However, as many writers have pointed out, not only is the term used as a blanket description of the militant ideology of contemporary Islamic movements, but subsuming the various Islamic movements (political, social, cultural, economic and local) under the general rubric of Islamic fundamentalist movements blinds us to the divergencies, internal divisions and evolutionary nature of the various groups. It also prevents us from engaging in a dispassionate analysis of the subject.

This paper argues for the need to make specific distinctions in the usage of terms/words such as Islamic fundamentalism, Islamism, political Islam among others so that their meanings, connotations and limitations are made clear. The starting point of this paper is that the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism is part of the world-wide religious phenomenon encompassing militant piety, and to understand it, we need to see it as part of the contemporary Islamic resurgent movements of which the militant and fanatical is but one of its diverse forms. While there is undoubtedly a religious renaissance among Muslims in many Muslim societies as expressed in strong commitment to Islamic belief, rituals, religious devotion and experiential religiosity (Hassan 2002, 73), nonetheless it is the presence of diverse strands of Islamic groups generally categorized as Islamic fundamentalist groups calling for the implementation of policies and programs in the name of Islam that has caused much concern. The first section of this paper reviews the concept of fundamentalism and how Islamic fundamentalism fits into the general understanding of fundamentalism. The different connotations and manifestations of Islamic political and social movements in contemporary times make it imperative that correct terminology be used in discussing movements that consciously and

determinedly use an Islamic doctrine and who are more radical or militant in their orientation and activities. It is these diverse strands of Islamic groups that in this paper are referred to as radical Muslim groups or Islamists that the remainder of this section focuses on. This leads to the second section which discusses the major concepts and issues that are the main points of contestation between conventional understanding of Islam and that of Islamism. This contestation is not surprising as among Muslims, debates on what constitute Islam are still continuing, and concepts central to Islamic belief, doctrine and theology are hotly contested by different groups and individuals. The different interpretations of the issue, particularly that projected by the Islamists who have put into actions their ideologies and thus strengthening their claims to speak for Muslims in general, need to be understood as the power to mould what people think.

Fundamentalism and Islamic Fundamentalism

First, we need to look at the term 'fundamentalism' itself, a term generally associated with militant piety that has arisen within the major religious traditions since the mid-20th century and gaining prominence and influence in the 1990's. The term was first used by American Protestants in the early decades of the 20th century who wanted to distinguish themselves from the more 'liberal' Protestants who they believed were distorting the Christian faith. The fundamentalists wanted to go back to the fundamentals of the Christian tradition which they identified with a literal interpretation of Scripture and the acceptance of strict doctrine (Armstrong 2001, xi). Marty & Appleby (in Piscatori 1991, ix-xvii) also noted that religious fundamentalism has emerged within religious communities when members of such communities believed their identity to be at risk, and in order to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group fortify it by reflective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs and practices from a sacred past. However, these retrieved fundamentals are not imposed as they are upon the community but are modified and refined, thus leading to doctrinal innovations. It is therefore both derivative and vitally original (Marty & Appleby in Piscatori 1991, xii-xiii).

The term when applied to reforming movements in other world faiths is misleading in several ways. As pointed out by Armstrong (2001), first, there is the implication that fundamentalist movements are monolithic when in reality they are not, as each fundamentalism (Christian, Judaic and Islamic and even within these religious traditions) has its own dynamics. Secondly, while the fundamentalists stress the need to return to the fundamentals, the way they do this is rather innovative and hardly suggest that they are locked in the past. Instead, interpretations of the fundamentals are made in a way that enables the fundamentalists to recreate a political and social order that is oriented to the future rather than to the past (Marty & Appleby in Piscatori 1991, xiii). Further, as an essentially Christian term, fundamentalism cannot be accurately applied to different movements such as those in the Judaic and Islamic traditions that have different priorities (Armstrong 2001). However, notwithstanding the above consideration, Armstrong admits that the term while not perfect is a useful label for movements that bear many common attributes, among which is their pragmatic rationalism of modernity and refining these fundamentals under the guidance of their charismatic leaders to create an ideology with a plan of action to resacralise an increasingly skeptical world (Armstrong 2001, xi).

A further consideration made by Denoex (2002) is that applying the word 'fundamentalism' to Islam is misleading in a number of ways. Firstly, the word 'fundamentalism' originating as it did in American Protestantism at the beginning of the twentieth century contains connotations particular to this specific cultural context. Specifically, Protestant fundamentalists believe in the Bible as the true word of God and that it should be understood literally. For Muslims, the Qur'an is the literal, infallible word of God, and in that sense all Muslims are fundamentalists. Yet, most Muslims are hardly fundamentalists in the sense of believing that their behaviours should be solely guided by religious scriptures, nor do they assume that these scriptures should be understood literally or that they are open to only one interpretation (Denoex 2002, 58). In fact, the different interpretations of the religious text indicate not only the diversity of perspectives among Muslims but also a point of departure among the so-called 'fundamentalists'. Further, If

`fundamentalism' connotes a going back to the `fundamentals' of the faith, this is deceptive with regard to Muslims as they are in agreement regarding the fundamental tenets of their faith.

In the post September 11 environment, fundamentalism, usually associated with Islamic fundamentalism, becomes associated with extreme practices and in particular with terrorism. This is not very helpful, for when acts of terrorism are linked to a specific religion, they push the adherents of that religion into defensive positions particularly if they are minorities whose identity and loyalties to the nation they are citizens of are questioned. This has been the current experience of many Muslims, particularly Muslim minorities in Western societies in the post-September 11 period.

The term 'Islamic fundamentalism' is used to connote different things. For most people, non-Muslims and some Muslims too, the term is often applied to those Muslims, individuals or groups, who are radical, militant and fanatical, whereas Muslim scholars have used this term to refer to those who wish to revive Islam (Marin-Guzman 2003). The Arabic terms relating to religious revivalism make clear distinctions between various proponents of Islamic fundamentalism. Terms such as *islah* (reform), *salafiyyah* (return to ancestors), *tajdid* (renewal), *nahda* (renaissance) differ from the term *islamiyyun* (Islamists) who wish to revive Islam and who practice violent means (Marin-Guzman 2003; Dekmejian 1995). The concepts of *islah* and *tajdid* are fundamental components of Islam's worldview and are rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad. Both concepts involved a return to the fundamentals of Islam. *Tajdid*, based on a tradition of the Prophet is understood to refer to a figure, the *mujadid*,¹ sent by God to the Islamic community at the beginning of each century to restore true Islamic practices. Implicit in this renewal is the belief in the righteous community established and guided by the Prophet Muhammad, and the removal of foreign (un-Islamic) accretions that have

¹ Dekmejian (1995, 60-61) sees *mujadid* as the primary type of leadership associated with the occurrence of revivalist movements. The notion of *mujadid* is embedded in the *Hadiths* (Traditions) of the Prophet Muhammad. It is believed that the *mujadid* is to appear every century to restore the faith against innovations. He is not a prophet sent by God, but is recognized posthumously as a *mujadid* as a consequence of his accomplishments. Among the important *mujadids* of Islamic history are Ibn Tamiyya, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Muhammad 'Abduh, and Hasan al-Bana.

infiltrated and corrupted community life, and a critique of established institutions (Esposito 1998, 116-118).

The term *al-Salafiyya* (salafism) is the closest to the western concept of fundamentalism. The word comes from *al-salaf* and refers to the Prophet Muhammad's companions, and is part of the expression *al-salf al-salih* (the virtuous forefathers). Salafism urges believers to return to the pristine, pure, unadulterated form of Islam practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, and rejected any practice, belief, or behaviour not directly supported by the Qur'an or the Sunnah of the Prophet. *Salafi* thinkers also believed in the right of the individual to interpret religious texts for themselves through the practice of *ijtihad*² (independent reasoning) (Denoeux 2002). They are thus inclined to be scripturalists and traditionalists. The puritanical movements of *Wahhabiyya*, *Sanusiyya* and *Mahdiyya*³ of the 18th and 19th centuries were a branch of *Salafiyya* orientations whose core practices were based on the teachings of Rashid Rida and Hasan al-Banna (Ayubi 1994, 67-68).

With regard to present-day Islamic fundamentalism, this is rooted in the recurring cycles of religious revivalism which has a long historical presence in Islam, and in fact in the early history of Islam was associated with scholarly and religious activity with the purpose of elucidating the principles and sources of particular disciplines. Dekmejian (1995) who views the present phase of Islamic resurgence as conforming to cyclical appearance of revivalist movements in times of crisis reaching back to the

² *Ijtihad*, independent reasoning and judgement, is when the original religious sources - the Qur'an, the *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet), and the *Sunna* (traditions of the Prophet) - are interpreted in an independent way, and are also supported by *qiyas* (reasoning by analogy) and *ijma* (consensus of the learned) (Ayubi 1994, 56). *Ijtihad* played a major role in the development of Islamic jurisprudence, but by the 10th century CE, there was general consensus among Muslim jurists that Islamic law had been satisfactorily and comprehensively delineated in its essential principles, and further substantive legal development was prohibited. This is commonly referred to as the closing of the gate or door of *ijtihad* (Esposito 1998, 83-84). In contemporary times, there are calls to undertake *ijtihad* in order to reform Islam and also to refute the claims of Islamists who have appropriated Islamic concepts for their own political agenda (Sardar 2002).

³ *Wahhabiyya*, *Sanusiyya* and *Mahdiyya* were religious revivalist movements that emerged between the 18th and 19th centuries in attempts to restore Islam to its pure and original state - *Wahhabiyya* in Central Arabia, *Sanusiyya* in the Great Sahara, and the *Mahdiyya* movement in the Sudan. These were strict, puritanical movements whose motivation was primarily a response to internal decay rather than to external threat, and they were strongly inclined toward fundamentalist simplicity (Ayubi 1994, 57).

Prophet Muhammad's time noted that in all phases of Islamic resurgence, fundamentalist responses to crisis are manifested through charismatic leadership, chiliastic ideology and fundamentalist personality (Dekmejian, 1995, 4). It is also a reaction to the severe crisis of modernity, and thus constitutes both a religious reform movement and a political ideology that includes a social element of protest and a search for identity (Zeidan 2001).

Following from the various considerations above, I would therefore suggest that we see Islamic fundamentalism in its varying forms and manifestations as a continuum in efforts by their proponents to return to the fundamentals of Islam, with the most radical of these movements seeking to implement an Islamic political and social order by violent means. In subsequent sections of this paper, the term radical Muslim activists or Islamists rather than Islamic fundamentalists will be used interchangeably in discussing the activities and orientations of present-day 'Islamic fundamentalists'. This follows Ayubi's definition of the term 'Islamist' (*Islamiyyun*) to denote a conscious, determined choice of an Islamic doctrine and includes those who are more radical or militant in their orientation. Islamists represent one of several intellectual and political manifestations of the interplay between religion and politics. It is an attempt to link religion and politics not by way of legitimizing government but by way of resisting it (Ayubi 1994).

A common goal of Islamists is the institutionalization of Islamic laws and values through the establishment of an Islamic state as exemplified by the first Islamic community established by the Prophet Muhammad in Medina in 632 CE. In the original Islamic community, the Prophet Muhammad was both a divinely-inspired religious leader as well as a political leader. In addition, the socio-political environment of that time saw no distinction between religion and politics. Thus, for present-day Islamists, the precedent set by Prophet Muhammad of a polity run on the basis of religiously sanctified laws and values served as the ideal to be emulated (Davidson 1998, 5-6). The means towards achieving this ideal differs even among the Islamists.

Forebears of contemporary Islamist political movements which challenge Muslim governments were to be found in the Middle East and South Asia with increasing cross-fertilisation between the two regions. The 18th century reformers of Shah Wali Ullah (India) and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (central Arabia) prepared the ground for a modernist movement by seeking to purge Islamic belief and ritual from the accretions and innovations acquired over the centuries. The Islamic modernists or reformers of the 18th and 19th centuries include such figures as the Persian Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, the Egyptian Muhammad 'Abduh, and Sayyid Ahmad Khan from India. This movement directed its attention to the plight of Muslims who had lagged behind in the fields of military power, political organization, and technological progress in the wake of European imperialism and colonialism. The movements of resistance to European rule during the 19th century and early 20th centuries were led by such innovators or *mujadid*, most of whom were members of the Sufi orders who sought to emulate the Prophet Muhammad's example by purifying the religion and waging war on corruption and infidelity (Ruthven 2000, 256-257). In contemporary times, the ideas of the modernists and reformists still resonate among many Muslims who see in Islam a source of identity and fulfillment and believe in the compatibility of living the Islamic religious life within the requirements of the modern world.

Present-day Islamic resurgent movements comprise a diverse range of groups and individuals, from moderates who work within existing political systems to violent revolutionaries who seek to topple governments. We also need to include among the moderates conventional Muslims, that is those who practice the faith in varying degrees of regularity. This is the simple category of being a Muslim, that is a person born of Muslim parents; or a *mutadayyin* Muslim (observant Muslim who upholds the credo and fulfils the obligatory duties) (Ayubi 1994). Even among these individuals and groups, there are also various levels of piety expressed through a variety of good works, and various levels of religiosity as manifested in religious learning or belonging to Sufi order (Ayubi 1994, 67). Then come the more politically oriented activist groups, whom Dekmejian (1995) categorized as active and passive fundamentalists. Passive fundamentalists do not routinely manifest political activism unless there is an instigation from the state or society at large; they are more

concerned with performance of the fundamentals of Islam – *iman* (faith), *ibadat* (religious duties), and *ihsan* (good works)⁴. Active fundamentalists are similar in observance of religiosity to passive fundamentalists, but periodically engage in acts of ‘purifying’ violence directed against places of illicit pleasure.

Most activists are highly educated people who have become disaffected with the socio-economic realities of their societies (Esposito 1998, 167). The moderate majority (passive fundamentalists in Dekmejian’s term) seek reform through gradual transformation of Muslim society, while a radical minority advocate violent revolution. The radicals believe that the refusal of Muslim governments to implement Islamic law and their repression of Islamic activism necessitates the counteruse of violence and armed struggle against the enemies of God, despotic rulers and their foreign allies (Esposito 1998, 168). Of crucial importance to Islamic radicalism is the reinstatement of Islam as the bedrock of the nation and its identity. The reactivation of the past, or its fresh discovery is governed by a futuristic vision propelled by the impact of the present. The historical golden age is used as a springboard for the leap into a new world. Thus Islamic radicalism is a purely modern or contemporary reaction to the emergence of revolutionary nationalism and secular norms of government (Choueiri 1997, 64).

For present-day Islamists⁵, their sources of inspiration have come from early Islamic history as well as from contemporary Islamic thinkers. The oldest sources stem from the Kharijites who represent the earliest example of radical dissent in Islam and the first to offer a different concept of the nature of the community and its leadership. This was a group of dissenters who disagreed with the decision by Ali, the fourth caliph, in his arbitration with challengers to his legitimate authority. The basic

⁴ *Iman* or faith in the existential commitment to God and His Prophet and expressed in the *Shahada*, the affirmation of the faith (*there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger*). *Iman* must be accompanied by *ibadat* (religious duties) as exemplified in the Five Pillars of Islam. In addition, there are other practices, *ihsan* (good works), regarded as obligatory and are regulated by Islamic law, and include social obligations, family law, dietary regulations and taboos, personal hygiene, relations between the sexes.

⁵ Among the Islamists are groups such as Hizb Allah; Al-Jihad; Jama’at Islamiyya, Jamiatul Ulama-e-Pakistan, Jama’at Islamiyya.

beliefs of the Kharijites include the sanctity of the Qur'an and its mandate to command the good and prohibit evil, as in the following Qur'anic verse:

Thus God makes plain to you His revelations, so that you might be rightly guided. Let there become of you a community that shall call for righteousness, enjoin justice, and forbid evil. (Verse 3:104)

This command was to be applied rigorously and without compromise. There is no flexibility in their belief. Thus the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad were to be interpreted literally and absolutely. Their world was also divided into the realms of belief and un-belief, of Muslim and non-Muslim, of peace and warfare. Faith must be informed by action, and public behaviour of Muslims must conform to Islamic principles. The Kharijites incorporated an egalitarian spirit that maintained any good Muslim can be the leader of the community, and that a leader guilty of sin be deposed (Esposito 1998, 41-43). Present-day Islamists borrowed three concepts from the Kharijites. These were God's absolute sovereignty and rulership (*tawhid*); judging as infidel and excommunication and assassination of those who blaspheme and those who simply sin; and refusal to establish leadership on any ethnic, class or educational basis (Ayubi 1994, 125-126).

The writings of Ibn Tamiyya (1263-1328) who believed in the necessity of using the rational powers of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) provide another source of inspiration. He held to the principle that every rule must be derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (Ruthven 2000, 267). While he allowed for the necessity of government and leadership in all societies, particularly Muslim societies, for the avoidance of strife and to enforce religious commandments, it was his advocacy of the rightfulness, in specific situations where a Muslim and a Muslim ruler is to be excommunicated and fought that has inspired the more militant present-day Islamists (Ayubi 1994, 126). More contemporary sources include the writings of the Pakistani Abul -A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979) and the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906-66). Mawdudi, one of the pioneers of Islamic radicalism/Islamists (Ayubi 1994, 128) had an extremist, ultra-conservative position. He believed in an Islamic state run only by those who believe in the ideology on which it is based (the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad) and the Divine law which it is

assigned to administer. Sayyid Qutb, who was the ideologue of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1970s, became the most influential theorist of the Islamic revolution in Egypt and beyond. Through his writings, in particular his book *Milestones Along the Road*, he reinterpreted traditional Islamic concepts to justify a violent takeover of the state (Zeidan 2001). Specific concepts that figure prominently in the ideologies of the Islamists in their goal of establishing an Islamic state are *jahiliya*, *jihad* and martyrdom. While these concepts, particularly *jahiliyya* and *jihad*, have their basis in Islamic religious beliefs and texts, for the most part these concepts were used in the writings of Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb in a novel and innovative manner, and have influenced the ideologies of present-day Islamists as the rationale for their use of violence in order to achieve the goal of an Islamic political and social order.

Islam and Islamism – contesting the fundamentals

For Muslims in general, there continues to be a deep and abiding concern to preserve a strong sense of faith and identity, to assert their independence and to define themselves in the modern world (Esposito 1998, 250). Hence the resurgence of Islam since the late 1960s, in both personal and communal life, manifested in varying degrees of intensity and forms among individual Muslims, religious organizations and governments. In addition, there are differences of perspectives between those for whom Islam, the religion, is an element in national cultural identity, and those for whom Islam is the basis for community identity and life (Esposito 1998, 165). This is also manifested in the use of Islam by a variety of Muslim governments such as Libya, Egypt, Iran, Lebanon and Pakistan to enhance their political legitimacy and authority. At the same time, Turkey⁶ under the direction of Mustafa Kemal chose a completely secular path, restricting religion to secular life (Esposito 1998, 169).

⁶ However, since the 1950s and peaking in the 1980s, advancement in Turkey's modernisation also saw a transformation in Turkey's politics which saw the growth of Islamist parties in Turkey taking votes away from their center-right competitors. Nonetheless, the nationalist secular majority in Turkey counterweight the Islamist and ultra-nationalist groups in both public life and in parliament (Narli, 1999).

In seeking to preserve the sense of Islamic identity, Muslims look to the precedent set by Prophet Muhammad of a polity run on the basis of religiously sanctified laws and values serving as the ideal to be emulated. Muslims are not only individuals but also a community of believers, *ummah*⁷, bound by a common faith and with a commitment to the creation of a just society through the implementation of God's will (Esposito 1998, 13). Further, concern for the *ummah* is deeply inscribed in the five pillars of Islam binding on all Muslims, both *Sunni* and *Shi'i* - the *shahada* (affirmation of the faith, that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of God), the five times daily prayer, payment of the *zakat*, observing the fast of *Ramadan*, and the performance of the *Hajj* pilgrimage to *Makkah* if circumstances allow. *Zakat* and the fast of *Ramadan*, and to some extent, the *Hajj* pilgrimage, are clearly of communal concern as it enjoins on the believers a sense of communal identity and responsibility (Armstrong 2001, 37; Esposito 1998, 90-91).

For many Muslims, the desire and even imperative for implementing an Islamic state with the *Shar'ia* as the basis for both law and ethics (Esposito 1998, 75) is an ideal capable of realizing. Such a notion is hardly surprising given the widespread belief among Muslims that Islam is not only a religion but also a blue-print for social order encompassing all domains of life, including law and the state (Hassan 2002, 15). The belief in Islam as a total way of life, and therefore that there should not be a separation between religion and politics, is a matter of great debate. However, as a number of Muslim and Western scholars have pointed out, there is a wide divergence of views among Muslims on what constitutes an Islamic state, and even whether such a state is prescribed in the first place.

Since the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad constitute the source of Islamic belief, rituals, regulations and law, Muslims have turned to these two sources in their search. In itself, the *Qur'an* does not lay down any specific form of state or government. What it does have are clear outlines of a political system and general

⁷ This is not to deny the diversity among Muslims and Muslim societies in general in that they are frequently divided according to religious interpretation, nationalism, ethnicity, class and status which invariably precludes a sense of the *ummah*. Thus, as argued by Hassan (2002) the concept of *ummah* has become a framework both for maintaining religious unity and for accommodating the cultural diversity of the believers, and in many ways becomes the basis of social cohesion cementing social bonds among the believers (Hassan 2002, 89).

principles of the nature of society based on values such as justice, equality, compassion and human dignity. As argued by Ayubi (1994, 4) 'Islam is a religion of collective morals, but ... there is very little in the original Islamic sources on how to form states, run governments and manage organizations'.

It must be remembered that the pre-Islamic Arabian society where Islam was to be established was a tribal society and culture where tribal affiliation and law were the basis of identity and protection (Esposito 1998, 3). Each tribe followed its own customs and traditions, and the only law prevalent was that of retaliation. Thus, what was in existence was a tribal structure with no distinction between a state and a civil society, no written law or constitution, no governing authority. A council of tribal chiefs of the tribes in the area made decisions that had to be unanimously agreed upon and it was the tribal chiefs who enforced the decisions in their respective tribes. If the tribal chief dissented, the decision could not be implemented. The principles of *shura* (consultation), *'aqd* (ruler-ruled contract) and *bay'a* (oath of allegiance) formed the basic tenets of the nomadic, tribal society.

It was in such an environment that Islam was established, and in Medina in 622 CE where the Prophet Muhammad set out to establish an Islamic society. It was in Medina that the document known as *Al-Wathiqah*, a social contract between all members of the Medinan community was made with the Prophet Muhammad, guaranteeing full autonomy to all tribes and religious groups. This is believed to be the constitution of the first Islamic state established by Prophet Muhammad (Berween 2003). This contract or treaty ensured the right of all religious groups to follow their own laws and traditions and that there was to be no coercion in such matters. '*There shall be no compulsion in religion*' (Verse 2:256). *Al-Wathiqah* was thus a sort of preliminary constitution of Medina which went beyond tribal structure and transcended tribal boundaries in matters of common governance. It has been argued that this was the first time that a concept of common territory necessary for a state to

operate evolved⁸. It is this document that Islamists have used in their arguments that Islam is concerned with political matters.

However, others (Ayubi 1994; Esposito 1998 among them) have argued that the Qur'an is most explicit in its emphasis on ethics, values and morality than on any political doctrines. The Qur'anic verse "*This day I have perfected your religion for you*" (Verse 5:3) clearly states this and supports the arguments that the Prophet Muhammad as a divinely-inspired religious leader established a politico-religious community based on faith as the main criterion for membership. Thus, given the limited nature of political stipulation in the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims have had to borrow and improvise in the development of their political system inspired by the Shar'ia as represented in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, Arabian tribal traditions, and political heritage of the lands they conquered (Ayubi 1994, 6).

Thus, to the question of what constitutes an Islamic state, the issue is still a matter of debate among Muslims. Apart from the general understanding that such a state is based on Islamic values, principles and law, Muslims in general, including the radical and militant Muslims, are not in agreement over what and how such a state should look like. In addition, most Muslim societies do not conform to the generally accepted notion that Islam is a total way of life defining social and political matters. For Hassan (2002, 227), the norm which prevails is that of 'the differentiated state-society formation in which religion and politics occupy different space'. Hassan further concluded that for there to be a constructive social-cultural, political, moral and religious role for religion which the Islamists (moderate and militant) seek for Islam within Muslim societies, there need to be a separation of 'the faithlines from the state and thereby prevent them from becoming the faultlines of the political terrain' (Hassan 2002, 227).

⁸ Between (2003) discussed the main principles of the document which not only laid out the rights, commitments, duties, and responsibilities of each group within the boundaries of the new Islamic state, but also principles relating to 'Security and Defence', and 'Respect for International Law'.

For Muslim political activists however, the belief in the complete and holistic nature of revealed Islam so that it encompasses *din* (religion), *dunya*⁹ (community/world) and *dawla* (state) is central to their political ideology. The Arabian word *dawla*, first used in the 8th century CE to refer to the rule of the Abbasid caliphate, became transformed in the twentieth century to *al-dawla al-islamiyya* (Islamic state). For Islamists in the twentieth century, Islam is an integrated totality that offers a solution to all problems of life and that the realisation of an Islamic society is predicated on the establishment of an Islamic state based on the Shar'ia (Ayubi 1994, 64). However, it has been argued that this idea of an Islamic state as propounded by the Islamists is an 'invention of tradition' with Muslim intellectuals playing a major role in the process (Eickelman & Piscatori 1996, 30). Further, the Islamists in making specific references to the Islamic historical past have also incorporated new practices and values such as socialism and capitalism to strengthen their viability in the modern context (Dekmejian 1995, 41). In particular, as noted earlier, the ideas propounded by Mawdudi and Sayid Qutb, provided present-day Islamists with the justification for their insistence on the sanctity of an Islamic state based on the Shar'ia.

Mawdudi's concept of an Islamic state based on the activities of the *khawarij* was that total and absolute sovereignty was with God and that humans were only delegated to implement God's law which is far superior to any political or economic system devised by human beings. In addition, Mawdudi emphasized the belief, first propounded by Ibn Tamiyya, that faith and acceptance of the credo (the *Shahada*) must also be accompanied by active involvement in a collective endeavour for fulfilling the command 'to do good and prohibit evil', to enforce the Islamic moral order on the legislative, political and economic affairs of society, an endeavour deemed essential in order to escape from the current state of *jahiliyya* (total pagan ignorance) in which Muslims currently live in (Ayubi 1994, 129). The word *jahiliyya* has been used by both Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb not just in a temporal but also a mental sense. As commonly understood, the word *jahiliyya* is used to describe the period of ignorance before the coming of Islam and is in direct opposition to knowledge (Ruthven 2000, 108-109). Religious ignorance in the Qur'an referred to

⁹ In Arabic, *dunya* means 'world'. Ayubi (1994, 68) used the phrase/term 'way of life'/'life' in his discussion of Islam - that 'Islam is meant to be *din* (a religion), *dunya* (a way of life), and *dawla* (a State). Sajid (2003) describes the Islamic way of life as *din* (religion), *dunya* (community), and *dawla* (state/society).

the conditions and practices prevalent among pagan Arabs, an ignorance which consisted of their refusal to acknowledge the oneness of God or their awareness of God's message and eternal laws. This message had been handed down in a long chain of prophets from the time of Adam to Muhammad who is judged as the most authentic messenger with the mission of restoring Islam to its pure and perfect origins. After the revelations of the Qur'an, all other adherents of various beliefs, with the exception of Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians, were considered pagans and polytheists living in a state of *jahiliyya* (Choueiri 1997, 93).

Both Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb however applied the word in a novel and innovative manner to describe contemporary Muslim societies which they claimed had degenerated into a state of un-belief, of *jahiliyya*, by their acceptance of Western concepts of nationalism, secularism, socialism, communism, democracy and capitalism, all of which were in direct contradiction to the message of Islam (Choueiri 1997, 92). Sayyid Qutb went further, claiming that *jahiliyya* is not just a particular period of time, but is an intellectual and spiritual temper that becomes evident whenever those fundamental values sanctified by God for humanity are replaced by artificial ethics based on temporary whims (Choueiri 1997, 93-94), and is thus an ever-present condition of denying God's rule (Zeidan 2001). For Sayyid Qutb, and later taken on by his followers, in order to overcome this *jahiliyya*, what is required is a declaration of the total sovereignty and rulership of God, and the achievement of this through the struggle of *jihad*. More than any other words or terms, *jihad* has taken on contested meanings among Muslims, particularly among Islamists for whom the word is central to their militancy.

In its traditionally accepted meaning, *jihad* means 'to exert' – an exertion of the intellect and a recognized source of Islamic law (Noorani 2002, 45). There are four ways of fulfilling *jihad* obligation: by the heart, by the tongue, by the hands, and by the sword. These were the spiritual and physical forms of striving that Muslims are required to struggle on all fronts to create a just and decent society; spiritually, by engaging in battle against sin and Satan in one's life - greater *Jihad*, and physically through righteous warfare - the lesser *Jihad*. For Muslims generally, the word is a

positive religious concept, whereas in the *Mawdudian* and *Qutbian* sense it is used exclusively in the physical sense of righteous warfare. Hence for non-Muslims in particular, the concept has a disturbing connotation as it brings to mind religious extremism and indiscriminate violence.

Together with *jihad* is the notion of martyrdom which is actively encouraged and glorified by Islamists, stressing its rewards in the afterlife in order to induce many to court it (Zeidan 2001). The concept and discourse surrounding martyrdom has a long tradition in Shi'i Islam with the martyrdom of Husayn, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, providing the role model of protest against tyranny for Shi'i Muslims. In Shi'i ideology, martyrdom is a deliberate choice that will strengthen future generations while shaming the evil powers of the enemy (Zeidan 2001). The yearly commemoration of Husayn's martyrdom not only constitutes popular forms of piety and entertainment but also a distinctive way of preserving and appropriating a sacred history and heritage (Esposito 1998, 113). It is also an occasion closely watched by the ruling establishment in contemporary Iran as a means of gauging the political climate of the people. In contemporary times too, the martyr motive has been demonstrated by young Iranians who found their death during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s when volunteering for duty as human assault waves or living land-mine detonators, as well as by Hizbullah activists in Lebanon. Sunni radicals have also utilized the concept and the discourse around martyrdom as demonstrated by Palestinian HAMAS and suicide bombings in Israel, as well as the suicidal attacks on the Twin Towers in New York (Zeidan 2001).

Since the 1970s and 1980s, most Islamists have focused their violent activities to destabilizing and destroying infidel regimes in their own states, with a shift in the 1990s to the international arena following the effects of the Afghan war against Soviet invasion. Hunter (2001) noted that events of September 11 point to a disturbing trend in the evolution of Islamic extremism and its regional and international networks. Some aspects of this new trend in extremism among militant Muslim groups indicate a more dogmatic and inflexible ideology, the core of which is a distorted version of the concept of *Jihad*. Rooted in the Afghan conflicts of the 1970s,

the Russo-Afghan War, and the Afghan Civil War, this brand of Islamic extremists have done battle in conflicts in Bosnia and Chechnya, situations which have provided them with military training skills. More significantly, these conflicts have given rise to a geographically widespread network of extremists with common experience, and includes supporters from Muslims in North America to Southeast Asia.

The new wave of terrorist activities taking place globally has been closely associated with radical Muslim groups. The argument that Islam is inherently a militant religion is not only questionable, but equally so is the notion that Muslims are willing to support the actions of radical and militant Muslims. Certainly there is a religious renaissance among Muslims and Muslim societies in general, but as pointed out by Hassan (2002) in his survey of four diverse Muslim nations, the evidence suggests that religious piety appears to be associated with a decline in support for militant Islamic movements. However, the declining support for radical and militant movements is paradoxically further radicalizing them into more violent and secretive organization. This new militancy appears to be fuelled by a sense of desperation and humiliation caused by globalisation and the increasing economic, cultural, technological, and military hegemony of the West (Hassan 2002, 234).

Conclusion

This paper began with a discussion of Islamic fundamentalism, which in its original usage had some positive points as it involves a concern with the need to revive Islam. Further, not only is Islamic fundamentalism rooted in times of crisis, which has a long historical presence in Islam, it is also a reaction to the severe crisis of modernity, making it both a religious reform movement and a political ideology that includes a social element of protest and a search for identity. The radical and militant elements, referred to as Islamists in this paper, use concepts which have their basis in Islamic religious beliefs and texts, but these have been reinterpreted in a novel and innovative way to justify their use of violence in order to achieve the goal of an Islamic political and social order. Islam is a religion of peace, understanding and tolerance, and the activities of the radical and militant Muslims who have successfully projected their version of Islam into the public discourse need to be

challenged and recognized as just another voice in the complex and diverse myriad of voices, visions and missions of Muslims in general.

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