

The Political Philosophy of Islamic Movements

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Introduction

The contemporary resurgence of Islam is primarily seen from a political perspective, hence the popular appellation—political Islam.¹ The challenge that political Islam has posed to the present world order has in many ways undermined or threatened to undermine immediate western political and economic interests in the Muslim World. The loss of Iran in 1979 to Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Revolution deprived the United States of a rich and servile ally that guaranteed and subsidized the perpetuation of U.S. hegemony over Middle East and its oil resources.² Similarly, with the growth of Islamic movements in Sudan, Turkey, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Palestine, the threat to western influence and their authoritarian ruling allies has become increasingly more potent.³

Needless to say, these conditions have brought greater attention to the now global phenomenon of Islamic resurgence. However, this attention has been mainly geopolitical in its focus. Many scholars have made an effort to go beyond the discourse of "The Threat" in order to study Islamic movements and their leaders.⁴ Biographies of Islamists and detailed studies of Islamic movements and organizations have surfaced.⁵ Analysis of the phenomenon as well as its discourse has also been published.⁶ But what is missing is a philosophical synthesis of the Islamist discourse that does not start with the premise that the contemporary resurgence of Islam is driven by a reactionary polemic and sustained by political and selective interpretations of the Qur'an and Islamic traditions.

This chapter is one small step in that direction. Its point of departure is the well-established Islamic tradition of revival and reform.⁷ Revival (*tajdid*) and reform (*islah*) are Islam's internal mechanics for self-purification and for the periodic transcendence of its corporate self.⁸ These two concepts constitute a tradition that has the responsibility of safeguarding the Muslim *umma* (community) from deviating too much from the principles and practices of the Islamic faith.⁹ This tradition has become the philosophical foundation for anchoring and justifying efforts toward contemporary Islamic revival and reform. The *mujaddid* (the reviver) is the central personality and also the main theoretician who leads the effort to revive Islamic values and to reconstruct Muslim society.¹⁰ According to a tradition (hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad, a *mujaddid* will come at the beginning of every century in order to arrest the decline of Islamic practices and to revive adherence to Islamic values and principles.¹¹ This same *mujaddid* is also a reformer since there can be no revival without reform. Thus *tajdid* and *islah* are concomitant.¹²

Ijtihad, the use of independent reasoning and reinterpretation of the Qur'an and Islamic traditions, is the standard tool of the *mujaddid*.¹³ *Ijtihad* is an important epistemological vehicle within Islam that protects it from stagnation, irrelevance, and anachronism.¹⁴ Through *ijtihad*, the reviver finds the empowerment that allows him to revitalize Islamic beliefs by contextualizing them—by relating Islam to the immediate existential conditions of Muslims. By reinterpreting reality through Islamic lenses and simultaneously reinterpreting the sacred texts with a steady eye on contemporary conditions, the *mujaddids* systematically reduce the distance between text and time, between reason and revelation, between conscience and consciousness, between the here and the hereafter, and between values and politics. In the contemporary *mujaddid*, the three functions of revival (of values), reform (of society), and reinterpretation (of texts) have merged to create a powerful persona that has the potential to transform the nature of world politics and history.

Since Jamal-ad-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897) started calling for the expulsion of the British and foreign rulers from Muslim lands, there have been a stream of *mujaddids* struggling to revive Islamic identity and "Muslimness" in order to create a strong community of believers (the *umma*) who would restore the past glory of Islam.¹⁵ They have sought to reform Muslim societies languishing in corrupt and un-Islamic traditions in order to liberate and reconstruct a vibrant civilization. These *mujaddids*, like secular modernizers such as Kemal Atatürk in Turkey, strive to liberate Muslim energies and creativity from stifling traditions, in order to catch up with the times. The secular modernizers have, following western Weberian theories of modernization, placed the blame for underdevelopment on

Islam and Islamic traditions, and sought to minimize its role in modern postcolonial states. The *mujaddids*, in their pursuit of modernization as well as Islamic revival, have sought to attack un-Islamic traditions, such as *taqlid* (blind imitation), which had gained firm foothold over Islamic institutions, beliefs, and practices.¹⁶

For the contemporary *mujaddids*, who make keen distinctions between “true Islam” and “un-Islamic traditions,” Islamization is modernization. But they are careful to differentiate between westernization and modernization. For many contemporary *mujtahids* (scholars who engage in exegesis of the Qur’an), the emergence of state-patronized *ulama’* (clergy) and the institutionalization of *taqlid* (imitation of a Muslim legal scholar) are the two most important reasons for the decline of the Muslim *umma*. Liberation from these two conservative institutions, the *mujaddids* believe, will open the floodgates of creativity that have been stifled for centuries. In this sense, the contemporary Islamic revival is a struggle for freedom—freedom from blind imitation and institutionalized conservatism. It is a movement toward the transcendence of the Muslim corporate self through liberation from decadent and cancerous traditions that have corrupted Islam and stunted the creativity of the *umma*.¹⁷

This chapter is an account of the contemporary *mujaddids’* interaction with texts and reality. It is an attempt to study their discourse as a political philosophy. Perhaps, such an attempt to examine a discourse from a foreign epistemological framework may do injustice, even violence, to the discourse itself. But the failure to do so would perpetuate the misunderstandings, prejudices, and even hostility that exists in the West with respect to Islam and its present resurgence. This chapter will seek to familiarize and de-estrane Islamic discourse from western political thought. While it will seek to include the works of many contemporary Muslim revivalists, the focus will be on the ones who have had the most impact—Maulana Maududi, Syed Qutb, and Ayatollah Khomeini. The chapter will also examine the ideas of more recent Islamist thinkers, such as Rachid Ghannushi of Tunisia, Muhammad Khatami of Iran, and Necmettin Erbakan of Turkey.

Discourses of Islamic Resurgence as Political Philosophy

Leo Strauss in his essay “What is Political Philosophy?” provides a useful definition of what is conveyed when we claim that a body of thought constitutes a political philosophy.¹⁸ He argues that political philosophy is “the conscious, coherent and relentless effort to replace opinions about the political fundamentals with knowledge about them.”¹⁹ Furthermore,

Strauss suggests that political philosophy is the attempt “to know both the nature of political things and the right, or the good, political order.”²⁰ This chapter argues, notwithstanding other claims,²¹ that the discourse of contemporary Islamic resurgence, when divested of its polemical content, constitutes a political philosophy of Islam at least in a Straussian sense.

However, before such a claim can be elaborated, the distinction that Strauss makes between political theology and political philosophy needs to be addressed. Strauss’ claims that political theology is political teachings based on divine revelation are predicated on a Christian understanding of revelation. In Islam, the principle of *ijtihad* is the vehicle that employs “human reason” and “independent judgement” in order to contextualize the significance of revelation. Thus, through a fusion of reason and revelation, “truth” is made temporally relevant. Thus the ahistorical and acontextual truth—the Truth—which is contained in the Qur’an, is accessed via reason to articulate “applicable truths,” which are relevant to a specific time and place. This understanding of the nature of revelation and its relation to reason is the foundational principle of contemporary Islamic political philosophy. The *mujaddids* in their discourse not only discuss the nature of things that are political, such as sovereignty, state, constitution, laws, citizenship, imperialism, colonization, hegemony, revolution, change, and power, but they are also seeking to articulate the “just order,” which would be ruled by the just and the virtuous and inhabited by those who value justice and virtue. Once the veils of strangeness are removed, it is easy to see the quest for the virtuous republic, for the just and peaceful order, in the discourses of political Islam.

Following prominent scholars in the field I shall refer to the contemporary resurgence of Islam as Islamism. Most scholars who have attempted to understand the Islamist discourse have primarily explained it as a political movement in pursuit of power. More discerning and less dismissive students of Islamism have pointed to the search for Islamic identity in the modern world as a central aspect of Islamist discourse. It is also seen as an attempt to search for a place for the “Muslim self” in the postcolonial world.²²

The devastation of Islamic institutions and their bases for social cohesion and identity under western colonization and the failure of modernization to alleviate the material conditions of the Muslim world have combined to create a crisis to which Islamism is a response. Muslim leaders, like Maududi, Qutb, and Khomeini, who attribute the decline to departure from “the straight path,” have looked to Islam for solutions. The response has been a global wave seeking a reprieve from the harshness of reality—from poverty, from authoritarianism, from foreign manipulation, from Zionism, and from pernicious shadows of the past. The Islamist

discourse in its spontaneity, its anger, its polemic, and its anguish seeks to simultaneously raise these issues and offer solutions.

Synthesizing this diverse discourse is not exactly an easy task, especially since all Islamists keep shifting from the particular to the universal with great dexterity. However, one can identify three prominent discursive themes that can be considered as the constitutive pillars of Islamist philosophy. We can know these three central themes by knowing their nature—they are *critical* in character, *reconstitutive* in scope, and *programmatic* in their endeavor. The dominant theme is the critical philosophy of Islamism. It is dominant for it supports and thrives on the large polemical content of Islamist discourse. The second and the most sophisticated theme is the reconstitutive philosophy. It engenders the discourse on the need for reform of the decaying Muslim society and its inefficient and autocratic states. It is also the source for the call for *ijtihad*—reinterpretation of Islam.²³ The third theme is yet underdeveloped. It is the positivist and programmatic philosophy of Islamism that seeks to go beyond the slogan of “Islam is the solution” to actually articulate specific policies.

The Critical Dimension

The political discourse of Islamists began as an attempt to articulate a critique of imperialism, westernization, and the de-Islamization of society. In the twentieth century, the works of Maulana Maududi, Ayatullah Khomeini, Syed Qutb, and Hasan al-Turabi have combined to evolve into a complex critical philosophy. The main objects of their critique are modernity, the West, the postcolonial state, and the dominant hegemonic coalition in the Muslim world. Many of the fears of Islamic resurgence in the West, at least at the popular level, is a response to the polemics that accompany the critique. Islamists have used polemics as a tool to mobilize mass consciousness. But a limited focus on that has detracted many students of Islamism from coming to terms with the more concrete and philosophical dimensions of their critique.²⁴

Critique of Modernity

Recognizing that modernity privileges human sovereignty over and above everything, thus challenging the very existence of a “God” and his intervention in human affairs, Islamists have attached great significance to asserting “God’s sovereignty.” Their discourse is overwhelmingly theocentric and their politics increasingly legalistic. By legalistic I am alluding to their insistence that the Shari‘a (Islamic law) be declared paramount.

Their critique of democracy, even though they seek democratization by demanding political participation, is a rejection of human agency in promulgating legislation. Laws can only be created by the Creator, for he alone is sovereign. In attacking anthropocentrism and the sovereignty of human agency, Islamists have demonstrated their ability to identify the philosophical foundations of modernity and a capacity to discursively challenge it.²⁵

Islamists have attacked the current western notions of freedom. Interestingly their critique of freedom is more Kantian than they realize. They argue that for the West, freedom means freedom to do whatever one wishes, whereas freedom should mean freedom to do the “right thing.” Thus freedom is freedom to assert God’s sovereignty, freedom to fulfill His wishes in private and public life, and freedom to purify and inculcate righteousness in the self.²⁶ Freedom, Islamists insist, is not the opportunity to submit to slavery of one’s passions. Freedom is freedom from the slavery of passions (*nafs*) and the opportunity to act righteously to create the just order. It is not a license to be morally decadent and sexually promiscuous, as they see the West to be. Such a conception of freedom deprives humanity of its dignity rather than bestowing it with nobility and responsibility, as did Islam.²⁷

Islamists critique modernity for understanding equality as *equality of opportunity*. Equality for them is the *equality of outcomes*, not that of opportunity. Islamists point out that modern political arrangements (such as capitalist democracy) perpetuate gross inequities both within the developed world and the underdeveloped world. Mirroring dependency theories of international political economy, they critique international economic institutions for engendering inter-state inequity in the name of development and modernization.

On the subject of human rights, they dismiss modern critiques of Islam as ignorant and prejudiced. Here again they deny the existence of human rights on ontological grounds. Rights in Islam are never divorced from correlative duties and obligations. For the Islamists, modernity’s break with God is manifest in its focus on rights without duties. They believe such a formulation is ethically unviable and preposterous. They remind human rights activists and Muslims that Islam encompasses both the rights of human beings (*huquq al-nas*) and the rights of God (*huquq Allah*). While western critiques focus on civil and political rights, Islamists’ conception of rights includes political, economic, and religious rights and duties.²⁸

In the same theocentric vein, Islamists also attack the notions of secularism and nationalism. While the former is seen as a means for separating politics from ethics, the latter is seen as too particularist for the universalist aspirations of Islam. Islamists see Islam as a comprehensive way

of life that includes *din* (faith), *dawla* (the state), and *dunya* (the world). Thus this *tawhidi* (based on the idea of unity of the creation) perspective denies the separation of religion and state, and ethics and politics. In Islam morality and ethics are well within the purview of *din*—faith. Thus separation of *din* from *dawla*, faith from state, would automatically sunder politics from ethics. Nationalism is seen as an artificial source of identity that separates Muslims from their brethren and undermines the unity of the *umma*. Therefore, Islamists reject secularism and nationalism, the fundamental elements of modernity.²⁹

The tension between Islamists' critique of modernity and their appreciation of some of its fruits is not very well explored in the literature. While Islamists are aware of this, they fudge the situation by juxtaposing the term "scientific" for what they like (since they are not opposed to technology and science, which are seen as God's bounties) and "western" for what they despise. For instance, they are attracted to the democratization of knowledge as a consequence of technology (computers, publishing), but are opposed to the moral decadence and increases in crime and drugs that seem to go with modern societies. They would like to inherit the fruits of modernity while disowning its negative consequences. Some Muslim revivalists who are considered modernists, like Muhammad Abduh, have been more articulate and guarded in their critique of modernity. In that sense Islamists are not far removed from the concerns of philosophers in the West who are concerned with the "discontents of modernity."³⁰

Critique of the West

This aspect of Islamist ideology is well studied and perhaps the best known in the West. The Islamists are critical of the West for colonizing and exploiting Muslim lands for their economic resources. The colonial experience not only destroyed the institutions that held the *umma* together and well within the Islamic umbrella, but it also destroyed their self-confidence, a malady from which it still suffers. The fragmentation of the *umma* and the creation of artificial territorial polities is one of the lasting and debilitating legacies of European domination. The creation of Israel, its conquest of Jerusalem, and the dehumanization of Islam and Muslims in the world media to defend and justify Israeli aggression and military domination is seen as the continuation of the Crusades and colonialism by the West.³¹

The West is seen as a hypocritical culture that is heavy on moral and ethical rhetoric but Machiavellian in political action. The delay in coming to Muslim aid in Bosnia, the refusal to condemn Israeli attacks on Palestinian women and children, and the development of Israel's nuclear,

chemical, and biological weapons program, even as the West champions human rights and disarmament, are all seen as examples of its hypocrisy. The West crows about the virtues of democracy and human rights but begrudges Muslims those very ideals in Algeria, in Iran, and in Palestine. Islamists have not forgotten how the West heralded self-determination and political freedom as ultimate virtues, but killed millions of Muslims when they sought freedom from colonialism.

Islamists also see the West as supporting decadent monarchies in the Gulf and authoritarian regimes, as in Egypt and Algeria, to frustrate their attempts to reform their own societies. They see them aligned with autocratic and dictatorial secular regimes, which massacre their own populations to stay in power. They see the West's political influence as thwarting their efforts, and view its cultural influence as threatening to Islam itself. Thus, increasingly, the Islamic renaissance is facing the global threat of an imperialist, hypocritical, and hostile West. The *threat to Islam from the West* is therefore one of the dominant themes in the Islamist discourse.³²

Critique of the State and the Ruling Coalition

The primary target of the Islamists' critique is the ruling coalition of secular intellectuals, authoritarian elite, and the corrupt *ulama'* who have allowed the state to use religion for its own purposes. A Jamaat-e Islami spokesperson referred to this hegemonic coalition, prevalent in nearly all Muslim states, as the "unholy trinity." While the state and its epistemic constituency is criticized for implementing un-Islamic laws, making peace with Zionist Israel, and succumbing to the imperial interests of the United States, the *ulama'* are castigated for legitimizing these practices.³³

Islamists see the state as having betrayed the interests of its masses by selling out to western powers. The return of the Shah after a CIA-sponsored coup had scuttled democracy in Iran in 1956, and his eagerness to share 50 percent of Iran's oil profits with foreign firms is one of many such incidents. Islamists also point to the Camp David accord and the continuation of Israeli aggression in expanding settlements, as well as the invasion and occupation of southern Lebanon until 2000, as other instances during which Middle Eastern regimes have sacrificed national and Muslim interests to maintain their relations with the West.³⁴

The state and its secular intellectuals are seen as collaborating with their Zionist and Christian allies in destroying Islam and its sacred traditions. The *ulama'* by not openly challenging these state activities are seen as providing legitimacy to these regimes. The *ulama'* are found

guilty of perpetuating *taqlid*, hindering the progress of the *umma* and the development of a more powerful and reconstituted Islam that is capable of meeting contemporary challenges. Islamist critical philosophy has helped create mass social movements and institutions of civil society in the Middle East by generating public interest in political affairs and exposing the policies of the state. The failure of Middle Eastern nation-states to respond adequately through modernization and economic development has given further credence to the Islamist critique of western modernity. Prosperity and progress is missing, and the freedom to believe is brutally curtailed. Modernity seems to merely attack Islamic family and religious values without delivering any of the promised fruits, such as prosperity, progress, and freedom.³⁵

The Reconstitutive Dimension

It is needless to say, that to a student of Islamic resurgence with philosophical affinities, the reconstitutive dimension has the most intellectual appeal. Reconstitution implies a systematic application of *ijtihad* in order to derive contemporarily relevant moral and political guidance from the sacred texts. It is here that the gap between text and time is reduced. The process of reconstitution involves analysis of the sociopolitical condition of the *umma* from an Islamic perspective, in order to examine the degree of the Islamization of society. Having done that, the Islamists then turn to the Qur'an and Islamic traditions in search for principles that can shed light on these issues.

This process is very different from what some Islamists suggest, which is a return to the implementation of the Shari'a in a literal sense. But even these groups are concerned with the reconstitution of society itself. They argue that through *da'wa* (invitation to Islam), an Islamic society can be created that is committed to an *a priori* implementation of Islamic law and creation of an Islamic state. If such a society exists, then they will not wish to violate Islamic laws and there will be no need to rethink Islam. But many in the Muslim world believe that the *ulama'* have allowed Islam to become stagnant, which is the cause for the decline of the *umma*. The philosophy behind this entire project, whether it comprises the reconstitution of society or Islamic Shari'a, is a Qur'anic verse:

Truly God does not change the condition of a people until they (first) change their conditions in themselves. (13:11)

Thus the impulse for change is the overriding concern. The philosophy of change is also based on the article of faith that Islam is a value system for all

times and all places. An adherence to true Islamic principles is empowering and the primary reason behind the rise and growth of the great Islamic civilization.

The movement of reconstitution is gathering speed and momentum. It is gradually becoming the most important philosophical principle of contemporary Islamic resurgence. Here we shall discuss some of the major reconstituted concepts of contemporary Islamists. The most important idea is the concept of an *Islamic State*.³⁶ Classical Islam is based on the idea of the *umma* as the political unit in Islam. It is a universalist idea that does not recognize ethnic, cultural, or racial differences. To talk about an Islamic state and not an Islamic community is itself a major break from the past. It is an acceptance of the modern Westphalian political arrangement, where the major unit is that of a state.³⁷

The major thinkers who started advancing the idea of an Islamic state were Maulana Maududi (d. 1979) in India and Hassan al-Banna (d. 1949) in Egypt. Maududi is the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami (Society of Islam) and Banna founded the Ikhwan al-Muslimin (the Muslim Brotherhood). These two organizations, which are transnational in character, can be considered as the two pillars of contemporary Islamic resurgence. Having accepted the modern political unit of the state, Maududi, Banna, and other political thinkers who followed them rejected other important characters of the state—nationalism and secularism. Once the idea of an Islamic state was articulated, the seeds for a contemporary political philosophy of Islam were sowed. The dialectic that drives the development of this philosophy is the tension between continuity with the past and the need to break from the past.

Islamists argue that it is only through the realization of an Islamic state that justice and order can prevail. It is with these *maqasid* (objectives)—justice and peaceful order—in mind that the nature of this Islamic state was elaborated by Maududi and Banna and later by Khomeini and al-Turabi.³⁸ Interestingly, the Islamists focus more on the character rather than the architecture of the Islamic State. It is *Islamic governance* that they really seek. Perhaps that is why it was not difficult to embrace the idea of the state that was new to Islam. The Islamic State in Maududi's, Banna's, and Khomeini's terms is a virtuous republic ruled by a virtuous elite, where sovereignty is God's but delegated to his vicegerent on Earth. It is only in the articulation of what constitutes the "good" and the "just" that Muslim philosophers now refer to textual sources; for all other matters, reason based in Islamic tradition is the sole source.³⁹

Two other important consequences of *ijtihad* that have contributed to the larger ideal of the Islamic State have been the redefinitions of *jihad* and sovereignty. Maududi and Khomeini redefined the idea of *hakimiyya*

or sovereignty.⁴⁰ While they continued to refer to sovereignty as belonging only to God, they used the idea of man as God's *khalifa* (vicegerent) to place practical sovereignty in human agency. Khomeini chose the clergy as the repository of this practical sovereignty while Maududi placed it in the hands of the masses. Banna's position while being a little ambiguous was closer to Maududi's.

In principle, by couching popular sovereignty in divine terms, both Khomeini and Maududi have laid the seeds for an Islamic democracy. All Islamists have reiterated the importance of *shura*—consultative governance—as an integral element of the Islamic State. Together, *shura* and vicegerency make powerful instruments for popular governance. Contemporary Islamists such as Anwar Ibrahim, Necmettin Erbakan, Rachid Ghannushi, and Hasan al-Turabi have boldly advanced the democratic character of the Islamic State without compromising its ultimate goals. They clearly assert that democracy is not the goal, only a means. It is a just and moral and virtuous order that is the goal.⁴¹

Jihad is the Islamic sanction to defend Muslim lands from aggressors and to fight any resistance or hurdles to the practice of Islam. It has been classically understood as primarily a defensive war that was permissible only against foreign nonbelievers. However, Syed Qutb, a member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, redefined *jihad* as resistance to tyranny, corruption, and the practice of un-Islamic governance, thereby sanctioning its use for internal purposes, in particular against the state itself. For centuries, the *ulama'* have preferred order to justice and discouraged violent opposition to unjust rule. For the Islamists, this is a clear sign of the collusion of the *ulama'* with the ruling elite.

Qutb transformed the principle of *jihad* into a revolutionary process that would be used to rebel against unjust and un-Islamic governments. Thus, in pursuit of the just order represented by the Islamic State, the Islamists now possess a very powerful moral weapon—the modern *jihad*, reconfigured as the just rebellion. Western readers may see similarities in Qutb and Locke, who too justified revolution against rulers who violated the social contract. Islamists justify revolution against rulers who violate the divine contract.⁴²

The Islamists are far from becoming successful, perhaps because they are still in the making at the philosophical level. The reconstitutive philosophy of Islamism is the only positive aspect of the political turmoil in Muslim lands. But for Muslims this is a revolutionary period in history; they are seeking nothing less than a renaissance. And if a renaissance will come, then it will surely be riding the intellectual advances made by the reconstitutive philosophy of contemporary Islamists. Critical philosophy can be a powerful instrument but it can only go so far. Alternative

thinking is imperative for the reconstruction of a weak and marginalized civilization.

The Programmatic Dimension

The early Islamists were able to articulate a modern Islamic position and motivate large sections of Muslim societies to seek an Islamic structure in the postcolonial era. Except for Ayatollah Khomeini, who realized his dreams by orchestrating a spectacular revolution in Iran in 1979, most Islamists have failed to realize their ideal Islamic State. Some of them have managed to come to power—Hassan al-Turabi with the help of a military coup in Sudan and Necmettin Erbakan through electoral politics in Turkey. Much water has flown under the bridge since Islamists raised the slogan “Islam is the solution!” Islamic resurgence has gained considerable momentum but has also stagnated a bit, unable to get past the repressive and authoritarian states that dominate life in the Muslim World.

Early Islamist discourse was characterized by brilliant ideas, pungent polemics, and a naive idealism. The first generation of Islamists was guided by two overriding objectives. Their first objective was to revive interest in elements of Islam that go beyond ritual and spiritual issues. Their focus was to drive home the point that Islam was not just a religion but a “complete system,” which could provide answers to existential as well as temporal questions of sociopolitical organization. Second, they tried to increase the political influence of Islamic ideas and tried in essence to crystallize an Islamic society with an Islamic state as the central vehicle, as they conceived it.

While the critical and reconstitutive elements of their discourse were truly path-breaking in Islamic thought, their ideas remained difficult to implement. More questions than answers seemed to surface as the Islamic movement gained momentum. Some of the questions struck at the heart of Islamist thinking. How does one operationalize “God’s sovereignty”? What does *shura*-based governance mean in the modern context? How will the Islamic State deal with minorities and issues of human rights? Will women be treated in a medieval or modern fashion? How are Islamists going to deal with Muslims who are practitioners of ritual Islam but are skeptical, even suspicious, of political Islam?

In response to these questions, a new breed of Islamists has emerged. I call them the “second-generation Islamists.” Second-generation Islamists are more concerned with the practical implications of the claim “Islam is a complete system.” They are trying to go beyond politics and polemics and are trying to find practical and policy-oriented solutions.

Rachid Ghannushi writes that “The uneducated think that the Islamic program is a ready-made entity: stick it in the mud and implement it”;⁴³ yet he is aware that unless the Islamists can advance specific and particularized interpretations of Islamic principles with direct correlations to specific existing conditions, their claim that “Islam is the solution” will ring hollow and be exposed for being nothing but a rhetorical gambit. In order to face this crisis, second-generation Islamists have added a more pragmatic or *programmatic* quality to the Islamist discourse.

The most important element of second-generation thinking is the development of reflection, introspection, and self-criticism. It is in this singular respect that Islamists like Rachid Ghannushi stand out from the Maududis and the Qutbs. It is this progressive element that has prompted me to call them “second-generation Islamists,” for they are indeed an intellectual step ahead of those from the previous generation.⁴⁴ It is through their work that the ideas and claims of the pioneers become more salient and meaningful. They also provide new life to the Islamic revival. Turkey’s Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party),⁴⁵ would also qualify as a second-generation Islamist, as would the former president of Iran, Muhammad Khatami. Hassan al-Turabi of Sudan remains an enigma; he is more like a pioneer facing the dilemmas of the second-generation Islamists. Perhaps he and his ideas are a bridge from the first to the second generation.

The discourse of second-generation Islamists is characterized by an affinity for democracy. Erbakan has already provided the Islamic revivalist movement with a priceless precedent. He has shown that Islamists can come to power through democratic process, run a democratic government, and then give up power without seeking to destroy the democratic credentials of the state and without resorting to meaningless violence. He has proven wrong all those (especially in the American establishment) who claimed that Islamists only believe in one vote-one time. Ghannushi himself has gone on record saying that not only are Islam and democracy compatible but perhaps the best way toward Islamization is through democracy. He writes, “I don’t see any choice before us but to adapt the democratic idea.”⁴⁶ Khatami too has repeatedly expressed his concern for developing the institutions of civil society and has emphasized the need for the government to obey the law. This is a remarkable departure from the totalitarian tendencies of the early Islamists.

The second-generation Islamists are, at the moment, rare, and therefore have not yet developed as large a body of literature as their predecessors. Of the three identified as second-generation Islamists, only Rachid Ghannushi has written extensively, but the actions of Erbakan and Khatami while in power speak volumes about their ideas. It is clear that besides

self-criticism and reflection, three major themes dominate the discourse of second-generation Islamists. These themes are power sharing, Islam and democracy, and civil society.

Islamists have gained significant sympathy for their cause in most of the Muslim World. Except in Iran, where they were able to realize a historic revolution, nowhere else have they gained enough popular support to gain political power. In Algeria they did enjoy majority support in 1992, but a secular military compromised the emerging democratic movement in Algeria to frustrate them. In most societies, Islamists enjoy support just enough to become a major force but not enough to ride to power. This enduring stalemate with secular nationalists has compelled Islamists to examine the possibilities of sharing power with them.

For this reason, Ghannushi believes that "Realism and flexibility are among the most important features of Islamic methodology."⁴⁷ He argues against the all-or-nothing option and recommends strongly that believers must choose to share power with secular groups. This is indeed a major departure from the revolutionary attitude of early Islamists. Ghannushi's realism and flexibility is opening up avenues for the gradual and evolutionary transformation of Muslim society. Using examples from the past, including the instance of the prophet Yusuf (Joseph) taking a high-ranking position with the Pharaoh, Ghannushi argues for a pragmatic politics, including cooperation with secular parties and governments.⁴⁸ This position may be new to Arab Muslims, but Muslims in India have been sharing power and working in a democratic environment with Hindus for nearly half a century. Thus, what Ghannushi is suggesting is not completely alien to the Muslim experience.

Erbakan has already provided a model of power sharing in Turkey by forming a coalition government with the secular True Path Party. Interestingly in Malaysia, Islamist sympathizer Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed and his deputy, former Islamist Anwar Ibrahim, have successfully employed a power- and wealth-sharing formula with secularists as well as with non-Muslim minorities.⁴⁹ Power sharing is a crucial idea for the survival of Islamic movements. It shows that they are willing to be more flexible and pragmatic and are not threatening to completely eliminate secular politics and interests. Tactically, it is an interesting move, for it can ideally prevent conflicts with secular states from emerging as a result of an all-or-nothing posture.

Intellectually, power sharing offers a greater challenge to Islamists. For now they have to find a concept that is intermediary between the secular nation-state and the Islamic State. It is here that the Islamist's interest in democracy and civil society plays a pivotal role. Contemporary Islamists are realizing that in a society that is so deeply divided between secularist

and Islamist tendencies, an open and free environment will help them more than those who are already entrenched in positions of power. Clearly, the merits of a free society that will allow them to openly advocate their position and that allows facilitation of participation is increasingly appealing to Islamists. It has been suggested elsewhere that given the mood in the Muslim World, a democratic society may advance Islamist interests. The Islamists will do better if they follow the sequence of democracy, then Islamic society, and finally the Islamic State.⁵⁰

Call it pragmatism or an inescapable movement of history, Islamists too are now caught up in the global discourse in support of democracy. Islamists like Ghannushi, Erdogan, and Khatami have repeatedly declared their preference for democratic governance. Thus, Islamists employ two kinds of discursive strategies in their discourse on democracy. First, like some western scholars, they argue that Islam and democracy are compatible. For instance, Ghannushi writes "Gross errors in judgment are made when either modernism or democracy are deemed incompatible with political Islam."⁵¹ Maududi also has written extensively on the compatibility of Islam and democracy, basing his arguments on the concept of *shura*, understood as consultative governance. Second, they try to articulate an Islamic conception of democracy based on the sovereignty of God.⁵²

Both before and after his presidency, Muhammad Khatami has strongly supported the development of civil society and the participation of political parties, and has demanded that the government respect the law. Khatami's interest in democracy and civil society runs deep. Just before he won the presidential elections, Khatami translated Alexis Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. In his first speech after becoming president, he emphasized the need for his government to obey the laws of the country.⁵³ Erdogan's Refah Partisi has participated at various levels of government and shared power with secular parties. Remarkably, even after it was banned by Turkish courts for allegedly pro-Islamic activism and for challenging the secular nature of Turkey, Refah has not resorted to violence or to any undemocratic means. This is the second time in three decades that Islamists in Turkey have shown restraint and a preference for democratic means, even as secularists have resorted to military coups.⁵⁴

Through new ideas and practical experiences, second-generation Islamists have added a *programmatic* and invigorating element to the emerging political philosophy of Islamic resurgence. They are grappling with the issues of democracy, civil society, and political pluralism. While it is too early to say that second-generation Islamists will become the prototype for future generations of Islamists, it is possible to suggest that their mix of idealism with realism and flexibility will serve them better than the pure idealism of the early Islamists.

Notes

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4. John L. Esposito, *Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality* (Oxford, 1992); *Islam, Politics and Social Movements*, ed. Edmund Burke III & Ira M. Lapidus (Berkeley, CA, 1988).
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10. John Voll, "Renewal and Reform in Islamic History: *Tajdid* and *Islah*," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John Esposito (Oxford, 1983).
11. *Ibid.*, 32–47.
12. Maududi, *Short History*.
13. Voll, "Renewal and Reform"; Rahman, "Revival and Reform."
14. Muhammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Cambridge, UK, 1991); Esposito, *Islam the Straight Path*; Taha Jaber al-Alwani, *Ijtihad* (Herndon, VA, 1993); T. Amini, *Fundamentals of Ijtihad* (Delhi, 1986).
15. Nikki Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism* (Berkeley, CA, 1983); John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse, NY, 1984).
16. Al-Alwani, *Ijtihad*, passim; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago, 1996); idem, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Islamabad, 1965).
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19. Ibid.
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21. Asad AbuKhalil, "The Incoherence of Islamic Fundamentalism: Arab Islamic Thought at the End of the Twentieth Century," *The Middle East Journal* 48 (1992): 677–694.
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32. Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*; *Islamic Fundamentalism*, ed. Sidahmed and Ehteshami.
33. Maududi, *Selected Speeches*; Nasr, *Maududi*, 115–122.
34. Ayubi, *Political Islam*, passim.
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