

# ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

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*Muslim fundamentalists throughout the Islamic world have seized upon the question of legitimacy of the regimes under which they live, absolute monarchies and all other forms of authoritarian rule, in order to come to the public square and pose themselves as popular alternatives to the existing unpopular regimes. This links up with the basic suspicion of the West which prevails among these movements, due to the corrupting nature of Western values which contradict Islam, and the alliance that the Islamists find between their corrupt regimes and that same West. To attain their goal, the Islamists have developed a vocabulary and a plethora of symbols to replace the secular institutions and the political jargon that was borrowed from the West. This essay includes a case study of the struggle between the PLO and Hamas in the Palestinian Authority. Not only does Hamas challenge the PLO ideologically, but it has constructed an anti-state, with solid economic and social bases, in order to take over the public square.*

## The Public Square as a Battlefield

Reputedly, the philosophic rationale for separation of church and state lay in the argument that religion was a matter for individual concern, therefore no state institution could be invoked to enforce it. All this is conceptually and practically accepted and

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applied in the modern world — Western style. Thus, the public square can be kept more or less neutral, give or take several manifestations of “indecent” mores and norms of conduct, generically known as “the new morality,” which have come to be tolerated by the general public as a price for maintaining this universally supported separation.

In traditional and conservative societies, the Muslim world included, there is little tolerance for the new morality, and its expressions in public are usually countered by outrage on the part of clerics, often by violence, and in consequence by religiously inspired legislation to curtail those liberties. Among Muslim fundamentalist groups, the outrage with the public square goes much further: not only do they reject Western values lock, stock and barrel, which they fault for the general degradation of mores, but they accuse the West of having schemed to undermine Muslim societies from within by corrupting their youth with its new morality that is visible in the public square. Therefore, they battle the visibility of the West with their own mores, and if they cannot uproot it with rhetoric and competition for the souls of their constituencies, they have no qualms about resorting to violence in the public square in order to get the attention of the public both domestically and externally.

Capitalizing on the general disapproval of many of the Western norms by the conservative public, these movements extend their criticism of the public square to include the entire political systems in their own countries, which they regard as subservient to the decadent West — hence, the public-squarization of the political-religious debate which encompasses all spheres of life. Since in Islam religion is part of life, and life is part of the religion, the latter by necessity is dragged into the public square. But it is not only the fundamentalists who set the agenda in the public square; the authorities who defend themselves against the fundamentalist onslaught also do, as well as established Islam which serves the governments in place, on the one hand, and regards itself as menaced by the fundamentalists, on the other. The debate is not conducted in words only, although the *Da'wa* (Call, or propaganda) is an essential tool of the fundamentalists in appealing for public support. They also commit acts of sabotage, kill government officials, foreign tourists and other designated enemies, and terrorize common people into submission; but they also build an infrastructure of social welfare, provide leadership and solace to their people, profess social and political revolution, and teach that Islam is the panacea for all ills of their society.

While the activities of the fundamentalists, both passive and violent, unfold in and from the public square, the government's reactions cannot help but occur publicly too. Governments also use propaganda to denigrate and condemn the fundamentalists, finding support in the *'ulema* (learned men) of established Islam. They use the public media at their disposal to launch vendettas against the fundamentalists and to claim that the latter do not represent "true" Islam.

The authorities also conduct massive arrests, engage in shoot-outs in the streets of their cities, mount mass demonstrations, run show trials, and otherwise attempt to curtail the high profile of the fundamentalists, all within the purview of the public. This compels the common people to take sides in the debate, and often to take part in fundamentalist activities or in demonstrating against them. All this is done in the open, in the very center of the public square. However, while the governments wish to cleanse the public square from the impact of the fundamentalists, the latter strive to cleanse it of "Westoxication," which they see as caused directly by or via the regimes in place, deemed to be collaborators of the hated West.

### **Vocabulary and Symbols**

Underlying the Islamic discourse in the public square are a vocabulary and an entire system of symbols which have been imposed by the fundamentalists and which have become universalized to an extent that even their opponents, such as the governments in place who battle against them, are compelled to make use of them. Very often, the incumbent regimes, who are in constant quest for legitimacy, must resort to those vocabulary and symbols in order to pose to their constituencies as no less Islamic than their opponents, who precisely delegitimize them and offer themselves as an alternative in Islamic terms. These terms encompass such concepts as Jahiliyya and Hijra, Shahid and Fida'i, government by Shura as democracy, the Zakat as the paradigm of the welfare state, Jihad — both spiritual and actual, Jerusalem and Hudaybiyya as powerful symbols of redemption, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab and Salah a-Din as worthy predecessors of the fundamentalist struggle, Israel and the West as the source of all evil, the old and new Crusaders as the paradigm of the enemy of Islam, and revivalist Islam as the panacea for all ills.

Jahiliyya and Hijra, which refer to the times of the Prophet, were extensively used by Sayyid Qutb, the great Islamic luminary

who was executed by Nasser in 1966 for allegedly plotting to overthrow the revolutionary regime in Egypt. His fundamentalist followers in the Islamic world have since extensively resorted to those concepts to define themselves and the world about them. In these terms, Jahiliyya is not only the era of darkness and ignorance which had reigned prior to the coming of the Prophet of Islam, and the epithet for the culture and way of life which had surrounded humanity before Muhammed's prophetic message to the world, but also the deserved attribute to characterize any society today which does not follow the path of Islam. Not only is the West plunged in its ignorance, but even Muslim societies which are ruled by non-Islamic tyrants of all sorts, are themselves suffocating in a Jahili atmosphere which only a revived Islam can remedy.

The Prophet of Islam, who could not sustain a meaningful life in the Jahili sinful city of his native Mecca, found the remedy in Hijra (i.e., migration into a sane Muslim environment where Islam could be brought to bear and a worthy life carried to full bloom). His migration to Medina in 622 CE marked not only his personal salvation, but also the rescuing of Islam from crisis and persecution and the beginning of a new era for humankind which was inaugurated right then — year 1 of the Islamic calendar. This major and far-sighted demarche of the Prophet, the most perfect of all humans, has necessarily become, like his other deeds and utterances, the model for all others to follow. Muslim fundamentalists review contemporary world history in these terms; they diagnose Jahili societies as being unlivable and prescribe Hijra from them as a way out. Following the Prophet again, who had used his Islamic base to battle against the Unbelievers in their Jahili lands, they also vow to pursue their enemies into submission. They may choose a spiritual Hijra, namely remaining in their places among the Jahili society, but creating their own enclaves of study, education, social welfare or even neighborhoods (i.e., the Muslim Brothers in Egypt and elsewhere), or they may actually migrate from their milieu and create their own (i.e., the Takfir wal-Hijra faction in Egypt).

A self-definition of the fundamentalists as the Hijra people, so to speak, also entails a definition of the others — the people of Kufr (Unbelievers) or of Jahiliyya, or the New Crusaders, from whose environment one must migrate and/or against whom one must struggle. Muslim fundamentalists have clearly identified their enemy: the regimes in the Islamic world which practice non-Islamic law; the West which has been undermining Islam from within and corrupting it with its norms of behavior in the public

square, with a view of tottering it and replacing it; and Israel-Zionism-the Jews, who are intrinsically the enemies of Allah and humanity, in addition to their being an arm of the West in the heart of the Islamic world. All these enemies must be depicted in evil terms so as to make them free prey for Muslims to attack and destroy. A rhetorical delegitimation of their enemy is a prerequisite towards making the use of violence permissible, even desirable, against him. Hence, the systematic and virulent attacks of these movements against what they perceive as their enemies, both domestic and external, even if at times they borrow a Western vocabulary, lending to it their own connotations and interpretations.

The underlying justification to launch war against such evil enemies,<sup>1</sup> domestic and external, is distilled in the quintessential notion of Jihad. Etymologically, this word was meant to signify an intellectual striving, and by extension also a physical striving, for a cause. In Islamic law, however, Jihad has principally one meaning: military action to expand the outer borders of Dar-al-Islam (*Pax Islamica*) or to protect them from encroaching Unbelievers. This idea is founded on the notion that Islam is not simply one of the revealed religions, but the prevailing and most updated faith which has come to substitute for, and to supersede, the other monotheistic faiths. It is then incumbent upon Islam to extend its rule all over the world by peaceful means if possible, by force if necessary. Jihad is usually viewed as a collective duty (*Fard Kifaya*) binding the Muslim community (the *Umma*), as a whole. Namely, when the Muslim authorities pursue Jihad, every Muslim individual is viewed as having discharged this duty. However, since Muslim countries have desisted in practice from this idea, mainly due to pragmatic considerations, Muslim fundamentalists have come to take this duty as a personal one (*Fard 'Ayn*), and so have consecrated any struggle of theirs against non-believers or against Muslim regimes not to their liking, as a pursuit of that holy duty. This is what the Hamas group has to say in this regard:

When our enemies usurp our Islamic lands, Jihad becomes a duty binding on all Muslims. In order to face the usurpation of Palestine by the Jews, we have no escape from raising the banner of Jihad. This would require the propagation of Islamic consciousness among the masses on all local, all-Arab and Islamic levels. We must spread the spirit of Jihad among the Islamic *Umma*, clash with the enemies and join the ranks of Jihad fighters.<sup>2</sup>

According to this view, and along the lines charted by Sayyid Qutb<sup>3</sup> and others before them, Hamas views the war against Israel and the Jews as a religious war,<sup>4</sup> and therefore Muslims ought to swell their ranks and fight it to the finish, whatever the price. As one of their leaflets says, "our struggle with the Jews is a struggle<sup>5</sup> between Truth and emptiness, between Islam and Judaism."<sup>6</sup> So it goes for the struggle against others which are targeted as the enemies of Islam. For example, during the Gulf War (1991) one Jihad recruit, instructed to set up and detonate a car bomb on a busy street in one of the countries fighting against Iraq, told a *Times* correspondent that the fate he awaited in the afterworld was far superior to the rotten life he had at present. But he added that his life was not all that miserable, for he was readying himself to die for his cause. He said that all lives were moving towards Heaven or Hell, and he chose Heaven.<sup>7</sup>

In spite of the wide variety of interpretations given to Jihad in modern times, some of which are soft and subtle, it is evident that the Muslim radicals, including Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Hizbullah, and certainly international Muslim fighters such as those who were battle-hardened in Afghanistan (the Afghanis) or in Bosnia, are uncompromisingly committed to the violent brand thereof. They refer to many Quranic passages which assure the martyr, that is, the dead in the course of Jihad, all manner of rewards in the next world.<sup>8</sup> This is the reason why Jihad has become the rallying slogan of many of these radical groups of Muslims, as in "Allah is the goal, the Prophet the model, the Qur'an the Constitution, Jihad the path, and death for the cause of Allah the most sublime creed."<sup>9</sup> Death in the course of Jihad becomes, then, an expected and even desirable outcome, especially when Jihad is taken as the explanatory motif of history. Indeed, radical Islamic movements regard the present generation's struggle in the path of Allah as only one link in the chain of continuous Jihad, inasmuch as the precedent fighters/martyrs had opened the path and the living in each generation must follow in their footsteps. In fact, the symbol of the Muslim Brothers is constituted by a Qur'an book hemmed in by two swords, their explication being that force, i.e., Jihad by the sword, defends justice as encapsulated in the Holy Book.

Hence, the powerful appeal for Jihad and for death in Jihad if necessary, is reinforced by Islamic legal prescription that all are liable to Jihad except for the blind, the handicapped and the old, who cannot expend the requisite effort in the battlefield. In the macho-prone youth of the Islamic world, going to Jihad is proof that one is not afflicted by those inabilities, Allah Forbid! One of

the heads of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt called upon the Jihad fighters to brandish the banner of Jihad until all Islamic lands are liberated and the Islamic Caliphate is reinstated. Similarly, Hamas leaders have repeatedly emphasized the importance of Jihad by according to it the validity of a Sixth Pillar of the Faith. In a *fatwa* circulated in the West Bank under Israeli rule, spiritual leaders of the Palestinians have determined that Jihad is a personal duty binding on each and every individual "until the usurper has been removed from the land by force of the sword." They rejected peace with Israel, if only because that would amount to cessation of the Jihad and the obstruction of the road of Jihad before the coming generations.

The fundamentalists have also forced on the public square discourse about the Arab-Israeli conflict in Islamic terms. In fact, supposedly secular leaders in the Arab world are dragged into that discourse in a match of one-upmanship in order to demonstrate that they master its vicissitudes no less than their opponents. And so, they discuss wars against Israel in terms of Jihad and the casualties in those wars in terms of *Shuhada'* (martyrs). Yasser Arafat, for example, has reputedly taken on an Islamic *nom de guerre* (Abu 'Ammar) and the brigades of the PLO have been named after renowned battles in Islamic history (Hittin, Yarmuk, Ein Jalut) or after Islamic Holy Places (al-Aqsa). Similarly, the war communiques issued by the PLO have always begun with the Basmalah, as do Arafat's statements — written and oral. Arafat, as did the late Anwar Sadat, frequently uses Quranic citations as a way to win the hearts of his audience.

Nothing illustrates the public-squarization of the Islamic political discourse among the Palestinians better than Arafat's fiery speeches, in which Muslim vocabulary and symbols abound. Not only has he drawn a parallel between himself and 'Umar ibn-al-Khattab in the context of retrieving Jerusalem for the Muslims, but he also uses Jerusalem as a mobilizing factor to arouse Palestinians, and other Muslims worldwide, for the battle of Jihad to liberate the holy places there. He also often compares his signing of the Oslo Accords with Israel to the Hudaibiyya Treaty made by the Prophet with the people of Quraysh in Mecca and later revoked when that was found expedient. This linguistic usage in the public square, which the late President Sadat also did in his time, goes a long way to tell the public that the war objectives, as well as the peace objectives, are founded on, emanate from, and are geared to Islamic bases and goals.

## **Ideological Underpinnings of the Islamic Discourse**

The Islamic discourse which has been imposed on the public square by the fundamentalists rests on firm ideological commitments and beliefs which are spelled out in a persistent and repetitive manner throughout the Islamic world. As an example, we could examine the platform of Hamas which was published in the beginning of 1988 and encompasses all the vocabulary and symbols discussed above. Essentially, this platform is the public response of Hamas to the PLO Charter, meaning that the debate in the public square should not consist of a PLO monologue, but should be challenged by an equally attractive platform which would appeal to the same constituency. By tossing the question of two competing ideologies into the public square, Hamas intended not only to signal the end of monolithic rule, PLO-style. The attendant questions of authoritarian regime, or other systems of government, which set the public agenda, determine national priorities, define national needs, and decide upon national objectives, goals, and aspirations also came to the fore and raised the thorny question of legitimacy of government.

No regime in almost any Islamic country can claim a credible legitimacy as it is understood in the West. No one has truly elected the regimes in place: they have either inherited absolute monarchical power, or have taken it over by force and perpetuate their hold on it with military coercion. Almost none of these rulers is backed by a permanent and predictable popular base, and this is where the Islamists can stake their strongest grievance against these governments. To acquire some legitimacy, these autocrats take on Islamic titles: the Curator of the Twin Holy Sites (Mecca and Medina) for the Saudi King; the Heir of the Prophet and the Guardian of the Aqsa Mosque for the Jordanian monarch, another Descendant of the Prophet and the Chairman of the Jerusalem Committee of the Islamic Conference Organization for King Hassan of Morocco, etc. Even godless Saddam Hussein announced during the Gulf War that he was adding the Islamic war cry "Allah Akbar!" to his national flag, in order to make his war against the Americans, the "New Crusaders," a novel version of the War of the Believers against the invading Unbelievers.

Lack of legitimacy means that someone is waiting in the aisles and posing as an alternative to the incumbent faltering power. The best organized and the most zealously poised to take over are usually Muslim radicals who claim their own legitimacy in Islam and its teachings. When they are in opposition to autocratic rulers, one hears them speak for democracy, free elections, human rights,



freedom of speech, and the like. They are, therefore, often perceived as moderate, reasonable, operating within the system, as long as they do not use violence to attack or overthrow the regimes in place (the Muslim Brothers in Egypt and Jordan, the Islamic Movement in Israel, Islamic Movements in the West). But when they do, they are ruthlessly suppressed by the rulers, usually with the silent support of the West which clearly leans towards autocratic regimes loyal to it (Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, the Palestinian Authority, etc.), rather than to Islamic regimes inimical to it (Iran, Sudan, Afghanistan).

In the past decade, the power of the international media, which passes over local restrictions and makes the idea of the global village applicable to authoritarian Islamic countries as well, has evidently eroded the almost absolutist nature of the regimes there. The sight of the collapse of tyrannical rulers in Eastern Europe, which was shown in real time all over the world, also triggered a dramatic rise in belief in the power of the people and in the ability of the common man, if determined and resourceful, to force down the tyrant. It is as if a third player has come into the public square to broker power between the authorities and their Islamic opposition. It is true that following the fall of such tyrants in Islamic countries as the shah of Iran (1979) and the Rabani clique in Kabul (1996), they were not succeeded by democratic regimes, but it seems that the fall of Suharto in Jakarta (1998) has been generated by a democratic current of yet uncertain orientation as long as it is not taken over by Muslim fundamentalists.

In order to gauge the depth of the ideological commitment of the Islamists to the debate in the public square, let us examine, for example, the political platform of Hamas already cited above. The following points of debate, both in the domestic and external arenas, illustrate the very tangible alternative, on all levels of politics — diplomacy, economy, society, culture, and even art — that radical Islam purports to pose to its rivals presently in power:

1. Exactly as the Palestinian Authority has its basic constitutional document — the 33-article PLO charter, Hamas posits its parallel — the 36-article charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement. The difference between them immediately puts the latter at a superior level of legitimacy and credibility over the former. For while the PLO document has been debated and adopted by the Palestinian National Council, as a secular man-made platform, the Hamas document was adopted by no one in particular. Every one of its articles is backed by a citation either from the Holy Qur'an or the Sunna of the Prophet, thereby

creating an impression of timelessness and divine validity. The consequence is clear: while the PLO constitution is amendable, as its Article 33 provides and as it was in 1968, the Hamas document appears as immutable as its sources of inspiration themselves. Legitimacy is preferably due, then, to the eternal and the divine, not to the fleeting and ephemeral.

2. Together with addressing specifically the Palestinian plight, the Hamas Charter juggles with Palestinian nationalism in order to merge it into a universal Islamic nationalism under the aegis of the Caliphate. Here, rather than forego the Palestinian cause specifically, with the attendant danger of losing its constituency, Hamas opted for tackling the Palestinian issue as part of the malaise of the world of Islam which can be remedied by the return of Islamic rule. Therefore, unlike the PLO Charter which claims loyalty to Arab nationalism, Hamas proclaims itself a wing of the universal Muslim Brotherhood, whose aim is to restore Islam to its original splendor. Once again, as against the disappointing ruling national governments in the Islamic states, Hamas proposes to resort to the much more hopeful and promising overarching umbrella of the future united Islamic Caliphate.
3. Unlike the PLO and other secular trends in society, which have taken to a blind and uncritical imitation of Western ways, Hamas proposes to mobilize society — human resources, economic resources, culture and art, in the service of purifying itself from “Westoxication.” To attain that goal, not only the regimes have to be replaced by more legitimate ones, but all the systems of education, the media, youth and women, must be reorganized and assigned their roles in society. For example, women ought to be considered as dutiful “factories” to produce Muslim Jihad fighters who will grow to carry out the will of Allah. Another example — since plastic arts and sports are of a Jahili nature, they should be eliminated and replaced by other forms of art — photography, films, and poster drawing for the sake of explaining and propagating Islam. This would entail, naturally, cleaning up the public square from all corrupting accretions brought about by the West and Israel. This is totalitarianism at its highest point.
4. Hamas urges the shelving of all internal difficulties among the Palestinians in order to devote all attention and resources to external battles against the enemies of Islam. Here again, they appeal to the authorities-that-be to desist from persecuting them in order to please the West or Israel, and to respond instead to the public desire to see the Islamists act without limi-

tations or restrictions. The only chance for Hamas and its kind to survive is to let the public square be open to them to make their case and plead for their cause. Yet their banishment from the public square, whether under pressure from the West or threats of Israel, can only serve them in the long run by alienating the masses of Believers from the authorities.

5. On the matter of the non-Muslims who live in Islamic societies, the Hamas proposes other solutions than the flowery promises of equality under the current governments. The Islamists proceed from the assumption that only under Islam can the members of other religions prosper, as long as they accept and submit to its superiority and hegemony. The rationale is clear: when Islam rules, fraternity, harmony, peace and love reign; when Islam does not rule, it is hatred, friction, discontent and bloodshed which prevail.
6. As regards members of other faiths who do not submit to Islam, their lot will be Jihad until submission. The Hamas Charter takes a particular interest in the Jews who live outside the perimeters of Islamic rule: they are, by definition, the enemies of Allah and humanity; they have concocted all the wars, the revolutions and the evils of the world; they prepare and scheme to corrupt all societies of the world via such organizations as the UN, B'nai B'rith, the Free Masons, and the Rotary and Lions clubs, in order to overtake them from within. The Charter cites liberally from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as a document of history, and confirms the wretchedness and final disposability of the Jews according to Islamic sources which call upon the Believers to eliminate them. Unlike the PLO, which has avoided sounding anti-Semitic, and has been willing to negotiate with the Jews and come to a political settlement with them, Hamas remains totally committed to fighting the Jews and expunging them from the land.
7. The political consequence of the above is that since the Jews are evil by nature, their Zionist movement as well as their Israeli state can only be evil like them and must be fought to the finish. Therefore, all forms of negotiations with Israel are thoroughly condemned. From their viewpoint, since the land of Palestine (including the territory of Israel) is a Waqf (holy endowment) given to the Muslims by Allah for all generations to come, it is not given to any Muslim to negotiate it away. And as difficulties in the application of the Oslo agreements abound, Hamas is in a position to adopt a "we told you so" stance, which may become very popular among the Palestinian

public and erode the moral authority of the Arafat regime in the public square.

8. Finally, the Islamic militants also offer in their discourse their own interpretation of history. Humanity has been polarized, in their view, between Believers and Unbelievers, the latter sometimes are represented by the Tatars or the Crusaders. This polarity is made of good guys, that is Muslims, the holders of the divine truth, and of bad guys, namely, the enemies of Allah such as the West and Israel. Muslim heroes, such as Umar and Saladin, are the liberators of the Holy Places and the dispensers of humaneness and equity to the world, while their enemies, the Crusaders, the Tatars, and the Nazi-like Jews, are the oppressors who are bound to fail in the final analysis.

### **From Words to Action**

On 18 November 1997, the terrible massacre of foreign tourists in Luxor, Egypt, brought once again to public consciousness the fact that Muslim radicals not only have an agenda which they try to propagate in their public square, but that they are prepared to use violence to enforce it, and not only in the public square of Egypt but of the entire world. They signaled to the world that they were no longer willing to accept their own oppression at home and their obliteration from their public square, while the world was watching indifferently under the pretext of non-interference in Egyptian internal affairs. By using violence against innocent tourists who had no part in the internal debate in Egypt, they forced both Egypt and the countries of the victims to take note of the situation in the country where their voice had been silenced. In other words, they transferred the debate from an artificially muted scene to a much more open arena which the Egyptian authorities could not ignore.

Similarly, the "Islamikaze" activities worldwide, and specifically those launched by Hamas and Hizbullah against Israeli targets, are primarily intended to bring to the public square, both local Palestinian and local Lebanese respectively, as well as the world scene, the concerns of those Islamic radicals which would have otherwise been ignored. The difference is that while the Gama'at<sup>10</sup> in Egypt aim at punishing the Egyptian government by hitting it where it hurts most (tourism revenue and international image), the other two movements battle the enemy on its soil, on the soil that they perceive as occupied by Israel, not their own governments with which they wish to debate on the domestic

front. But these violent activities, which we term "terrorism" in our parlance, are neither the only nor the main domain of normative action on the part of the Muslim fundamentalists. No less effective to impose their agenda on the public square are their constructive, long-term, socio-political and religio-economic activities which, in the long run, bring them the most dividends.

Basically, the fundamentalists, without stating it, constitute a sort of anti-state in order to rival the governments in place and to fill in some of their yawning deficiencies, especially in the economic and spiritual domains. They capitalize on the assumption that even if they are today banned from participating in the political process (as in Egypt and Algeria), they can build up a vast base of popular support which will certainly stand to their credit when the day comes. The Algerian scenario certainly confirms this assumption: for years the FIS<sup>11</sup> was allowed to act only religiously and socially under the aegis of FLN<sup>12</sup> monolithic rule, but when the Islamists were finally recognized as part of the political game leading up to the first free elections in 1991, they swept the electorate before they were quelled by the military with Western acquiescence. To some extent, this is what happened with the Welfare Party in Turkey, which gained a majority of the votes in 1995, and constituted a government before it was removed from power under military pressure.

This quietist attitude of building a base and waiting for the opportunity, which has been adopted by Muslim Brothers and their like out of recognition that confrontation with the regime might bring about their elimination, stands in sharp contrast with the militant and violent stance taken by such groups as the Gama'at in Egypt which regard terrorism as the only way to make themselves heard in the public square. They are far smaller than the Brothers, and their scarce resources, insubstantial penetration into all strata of society, and the restricted pattern of their diffusion in all parts of the country do not permit them a firm grip on a wide popular base. The Brothers and their clones, on the contrary, do possess all those attributes and can therefore take advantage of their ubiquitousness to air their concerns and grievances in the public square, not only through rhetoric but also through action in the open. Their domains of activity abound:

1. They publish a wide array of magazines, posters, books, leaflets, and also audio and video tapes which are diffused either free of charge or at very low and affordable prices. These publications address themselves not only to exhortations to return to the faith or to scholarly dissertations about the mer-

its of Islam and its historical heroes, but mainly to the daily agenda of the common people: where to find help and solace, how to solve particular economic, education or health problems, how to conduct oneself in daily life, etc. For lack of guidance and care on the part of the hardened official state bureaucracy, the common man feels neglected and left to his own devices, and this is where the Muslim movement steps in to fill the gap. This is also where the public square echoes the inefficacy and carelessness of the authorities with the warmth and accessibility of the Islamists.

2. Not only the common people, but also growing sections of the middle class, such as intellectuals and bourgeois, are aghast with the always unfulfilled promises of the rulers, with the increasing and spreading poverty, with corruption at all levels of government, even with the Islamic establishment which is sycophantly subservient to the rulers, and the rulers' own exclusive hold on power in spite of the lip service they pay to participatory democracy. They look around and see the Islamists as the only viable alternative. The latter do not seem corrupt; they project an image of purity and devotion to a cause; they care for the people; and striving without remuneration, they give without taking and are there when needed. They provide guidance and direction; they give hope; and they seem to know what to do in situations of helplessness. Above all, their leaders are of them and for them; they live modestly and are accessible at any time; and they seem to be the repository of wisdom, serenity, savoir-faire, and resourcefulness. Naturally the very presence of these people in the public square, and the long trail of good deeds that follows them and often turns into an aura of charisma, more than offsets the omnipresence of the rulers' cult which often invades all the media and the public space.
3. Muslim fundamentalist leaders are masters of public relations: they address national and international media, and by getting a worldwide hearing they assure their place in the public square. Not only do they make headlines following acts of terror, but also as a result of daring statements, either critical of their authorities or of the West, threats they voice against their enemies, and particular exploits that they boast of, such as hijackings, sabotage (actual or imagined), taking of hostages, extortion of money, and release of their prisoners, etc. Every one of these occasions assures them a high profile in the public square, both nationally and internationally, and on the same occasion they can also voice their gen-

eral grievances and profess their ideology. Two specifically Islamic means to attain high visibility in public are the Friday sermon (*Khutba*) and the occasional legal verdict (*fatwa*) in response to a problem. This means that all current matters of the day, in all spheres of life, have an energetic, immediate, and authoritative response which is tossed into the public square together with the prevailing views.

4. Fundamentalists have turned mosques into their bastions, not only because of their inherent symbolism as a place of worship, but also because of their intrinsic immunity from intrusion. Any authorities in a Muslim country would think hard before they turn a mosque or its yard into a flashpoint, much less into a battlefield. Therefore, not only do we witness a frenetic pace of mosque construction in areas of fundamentalist activity, but we also notice that the functions of the mosques have greatly expanded. Typically, a new multi-story mosque building would include a floor for social services (welfare, clinic, service offices), a floor for education (Qur'anic school, day school, but also computers, girls' education, etc.), a floor for sports activities, and the main hall, usually more sumptuous than the others, for prayer and meetings. This expanded sanctuary, where the anti-state can function and provide its alternative services with impunity, has become in itself a sort of public square where things are said and done as a matter of course, which usually go unchallenged by either the authorities or other opponents from among the general public.
5. To finance all this array of activities, the fundamentalists have reverted to levying the Zakat, the alms that had become one of the Pillars of Islam since the time of the Prophet and had constituted the public treasury which had financed the "welfare state" of early Islam. At the time, it was a regressive tax, imposed on all Believers, which amounted to some 8 percent of income. But today, with the modern states' tax systems, and as the Zakat is no longer levied by the state and is left to individual generosity as a sort of charity, the Islamists have stepped in and filled that vacuum. For them, this is the legal way to finance the people's needs, and each person is taxed according to his capacity: the businessman gives money, the building contractor — building materials, the destitute — manual labor, the professionals — time to serve the public with their skills, and scholars — teaching and spiritual guidance. And so, the Zakat has made a comeback via the back door, virtually as a tax, since people in a Muslim com-

munity are under public pressure to conform in order to validate, as it were, their membership in the congregation of Believers. Again, the public square is rendered active not only for the sake of congratulating the generous and condemning the miser, but also for the sake of creating an alternative public treasury to finance the Islamic community and to show the efficacy and honesty of the spending.

6. The Zakat is spent on welfare for the needy and on education, etc., which sometimes escape the public eye. But the Islamists also go for vast expenditure on public works which helps to enhance their popularity and visibility in the public square — such as the centrality of mosque building in fundamentalist activities. They also organize camps for youth to spend the summer in neglected and underdeveloped areas in order to conduct public works such as road repair, build mosques and public facilities, or bring solace to the poor, the old, and the handicapped. Two goals are thus attained: welfare work with high visibility in the public square and the corresponding credit the Islamists get in the public eye, and also keeping the youth off the streets during the summers of indolence and misdeed and channeling their vigor and enthusiasm into creative and positive activity, much to the delight of their parents. To gauge the tremendous achievements of the Islamists in the public square, all one has to do is visit the places under their jurisdiction and to realize their efforts in beautifying the environment, fighting crime, cleaning up local government, and making a good reputation for themselves. They prove that the problem of local neglect is not only due to lack of funds, but mainly to corruption, carelessness, and the inability to raise taxes or to efficiently spend the available money. The fundamentalists, aided by the Zakat levies, prove able to provide for all that.
7. The Islamists have also turned the Muslim holy places, some of which had been neglected and allowed to disintegrate, into a mobilizing factor for their cause. As part of the Zakat payments and the summer camps, or independently of them, they are able to rally donations and volunteers to clear and clean Muslim cemeteries, rebuild and restore old mosques, and insist that Waqf properties be dedicated to their stated purposes, namely, religious and welfare. By so doing, and especially by involving women and youth in these endeavors, they can publicly claim that they command a wide following of volunteers and dedicated experts, in contrast with the authorities who can only enforce their law on a reluctant citi-



zenry, thereby accumulating more bitterness and anger against them.

8. The fundamentalists have also imposed on the public square their mores and moral standards. All one has to do is watch the change in dressing habits in the Islamic world in recent years: more women than ever wear the Zai Sahr'i or religious dress, a sexless, neutral garb, with or without a head cover and sometimes even with a veil and long sleeves, which impart to the woman in the street a look of a mobile tent, exuding neutrality, asexuality, unavailability and hands off, in order to escape the scrutiny and voracious stares of men who are deprived of any sexual contact unless in a marital context. Also, co-ed classes at school are eliminated as soon as the children reach puberty. Men and women are separated on buses and in stations, and married women are generally relegated to house work. The new mores also include the abolishment of coffee houses and of alcoholic consumption, and encourage the frequenting of mosques as well as the growing of beards by men in order to emulate the hallmark of the Muslim Brothers.
9. One of the largest spheres of Islamist activity in the public square is participation in professional and social associations other than the Islamic Association. This is especially vital in countries where they are not allowed to run for elections as part of the political system (i.e., in Egypt and Algeria), or only as individuals and not parties, as in Jordan. Thus they campaign and win high positions in the teachers, lawyers, doctors, and accountants associations, or in the vanguard of student bodies on university campuses or in such charitable bodies as the Islamic Red Crescent and philanthropic organizations of all sorts which oftentimes act as a cover to illicit fundraising and the like. When they win elections in such bodies, they capitalize on them not only to gain influence in those organizations per se, but also to enhance their popularity as a whole and to make believe that they are up and coming as the alternative way of the future.
10. Finally, there is the question of technology and its thorny relation to the West. Fundamentalists do not mince their words when they accuse the West of corruption and tag it as the enemy of Islam. How, then, can they justify, in the public square, their usage of Western vocabulary and worse, Western technology, which has become so vital to their propaganda and to the very diffusion of their cause? For the vocabulary, they found a solution by appropriating it to themselves and

claiming Islamic antecedents to every one of the modern accretions to Western thought: for democracy there is rule by Shura, for socialism and the welfare state there is Zakat, for sovereignty of the people they posit the sovereignty of the Almighty, and for parliaments as legislative bodies they present the Shari'a as the supreme and unsurpassed act of divine legislation. In addition, tolerance, generosity, human rights, and liberal rule were practiced by Islam long before the West discovered them. Technology also has its justification even if the West is more advanced today. There was a time in the Middle Ages when Islamic science ruled the world; today there is a temporary reversal of the situation. Technology in itself is merely a tool, and its judicious use in an Islamic way turns it into a useful means. For example, television, tapes, radio, and posters can be used to spread the Qur'an, the exploits of Muslim heroes, and to raise Muslim awareness in general, instead of the films, music, culture, insidious propaganda, and pornography of the decadent West.

### **Consequences and Lessons**

Muslim fundamentalists have introduced a revolution of sorts in the public square inasmuch as matters never discussed publicly before have now been imposed and have become part and parcel of the public discourse in Islamic countries, in spite of government oppression. This new discourse, in which Muslim oppositions and governments equally participate, is precipitated by four streams which converge into one powerful rapid that sweeps everything in its course:

- First and foremost, the countries where Islamic fundamentalism has taken over the government (to date, Iran, Sudan, and Afghanistan) have also been the first to toss the new discourse into the Islamic public square. The success of the Islamic revolution there, and more so the explicit efforts made by those Islamic governments to sponsor other revolutionary Islamic movements elsewhere, have forced all Muslims to be either on the offensive or on the defensive in this regard. It is no longer possible to clamp down on this discourse, much less to ignore it.
- The fundamentalists in practically every Islamic country, from Morocco to Indonesia, and from Tajikistan to Black Africa, reinforced by the success of the Islamic Revolution in the

above countries, and aided financially, morally, politically, and sometimes militarily by them, have the means and, more and more, the audacity to speak up and act to advance their cause as we have seen above. Moreover, even in non-Islamic countries, in Africa, America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, the Muslim fundamentalists, who constitute more or less insignificant local minorities, gather momentum from other Islamic movements around them and participate in the discourse. Significantly, it is the latter who act with the most daring and conduct their activities the most publicly, since they can take advantage of the liberal regimes under which they operate to propagate their Islamic message. Chief among these are Great Britain, which is ironically accused by the Egyptians of sheltering Islamic terrorists; the United States, where fund-raising for radical Muslim movements (termed terrorists in Western parlance) goes unhindered; and Israel, where Muslim radicals sit in the Israeli Knesset or as mayors of a number of Arab towns, something they cannot do in most Arab countries.

- The Islamic establishment in the Muslim countries, which is customarily subservient to the governments in place, and has at its disposal the governmental apparatus and state media, counters the fundamentalists' propaganda with its own, trying to prove to the populace that it is representing true Islam and appealing to the crowds to skirt the dangerous ways of the far more popular and down-to-earth fundamentalist leaders and preachers. So, paradoxically, while attempting to protect themselves and the regime, they slide down the slope towards the radicals by borrowing their vocabulary and addressing their agenda, much to their own disadvantage.

There are significant numbers of converts to Islam in practically all non-Muslim countries where Muslim minorities reside, or among non-Muslim minorities in Islamic countries. These new adepts of Islam, just like other converts to other faiths, tend to become more Muslim than those born Muslim, either a natural outcome of their newly-found illumination and enthusiasm, or in order to show their co-religionists that they are no less Muslim. Many converts on all continents remain anonymous and do not attract much attention, such as the Black Muslims in North America, in South Africa, or among the Copts in Egypt. But when a celebrity, such as Cat Stevens (renamed Yussuf Islam), Cassius Clay (now Muhammed Ali), or Professor Hamid Algar, the eminent American Islamologist, embraced Islam, that became a cause for celebration for the radicals because it signified that those en-

lightened minds had vindicated the superiority of Islam and would bring with them countless others. These celebrities, who usually become very fervent Muslims, also contribute materially, spiritually, and morally to their new faith by speaking for it and proclaiming it as the root cause of their fame.

Unlike all the others who may harness themselves to the radical Islamic cause as a tactical device, or out of a temporary gain or personal satisfaction, the fundamentalists are strategically committed to bringing their convictions to the world. They possess not only a socio-political program which they intend to carry out to the letter, but being men of action, they have already launched, in their more or less modest way, the social revolution in the public square as a precursor to the total application of their plans. They seriously provide an alternative to the governments in place by hailing their triple slogan: "Islam is the solution," "Islam is the Truth," and "Islam is the alternative," which, in a situation of despair and lack of legitimacy, becomes a viable option.

In order to remain in the public square in the face of oppression by the existing regimes, the fundamentalists may show flexibility and readiness to accept the rules of the game. Indeed, most fundamentalist groups have shunned violence internally and are prepared to resort to the ballot if they were allowed to do so, in order to show their mettle in public. However, the authorities have learned from the Algerian scenario and are wary of letting the game of democracy run its course lest the fundamentalists exploit it to get power and then there is no telling what they might do with it. If we listen to their insistence on the Shari'a state they envisage, and the rule by Shura that they profess, then maybe free elections, which would get them to the helm, would also be the last. In the meantime, their moderate and "reasonable" discourse allows them to gain political asylum for their persecuted leaders in the West, where they freely publish their propaganda and collect funds without restrictions.

Political bargaining in contemporary Islamic societies is nearly impossible due to the totality of the Islamic claim. In theory, then, the rulers can choose between total democratization, to which they pay lip service but by which they may be swept from power as in Algeria, or they may practice total oppression, banning, exile, persecution, elimination, and exclusion of the Islamists. A small degree of liberty is not possible in the long run, because once it is accorded, more will be demanded, and with growing insistence and urgency, often backed by violence, in the name of the same liberty that the rulers had recognized and partly accorded. The murder of President Sadat by Muslim radicals

whom he had helped surface from clandestineness, and more so the removal of the reformers from the political scene in the Soviet bloc — those who had initiated partial liberty — are enough evidence of the futility of the halfway measure syndrome which consumes its initiators.

The Islamic groups, having embedded in their worldview the legitimacy of Jihad to battle their illegitimate rulers and the West that sustains them, cannot simply be shut off by oppression. They are accumulating popularity and strength in the public square, paradoxically under the protective wings of the West which accords them shelter. Instead of taking sides between fundamentalists who want democratic means to gain power, and their oppressors who, under the guise of democratization in fact quell any attempt to challenge their rule, the West should perhaps encourage the democratic process and non-violent debate in the public square, whatever its outcome. If the current autocrats should win, then they might achieve legitimacy and will perhaps become less autocratic and more responsive to the public debate. If the fundamentalists should win, as they have in a number of places, then perhaps the constraints of government will moderate them in the long run and make them less impervious to dialogue with the West. Legitimate governments which promote transparency, namely, debate in the public square, will, in turn, reduce violence and promote democratization.

## Notes

1. See, for example, Ahmed Rifa'i, *al-Nabi al-Musallah* (London, 1991), pp. 107-108, 120-148, where the onslaught of Shukri Mustafa, the head of a Muslim radical group in Egypt, against the Egyptian authorities, is described in detail.
2. Article 15 of the Hamas Charter.
3. Sayyid Qutb was the great luminary of Muslim fundamentalists in Egypt and elsewhere in the Islamic world. He was executed by Nasser in 1966, but his martyrdom has only enhanced his stature.
4. The entire Hamas Charter is interspersed with the vow for Jihad. Almost every Article repeats the Hamas commitment in that regard.
5. The term used in the text is Jihad, which can be a spiritual as well as a military struggle.
6. Article 16 of the Hamas Charter.
7. See Boaz Ganor, "The Islamic Jihad: The Imperative of Holy War," in *Survey of Arab Affairs*, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 15 February 1993, pp. 1-2.

8. One of these rewards is free sex with 70 virgins who regain their virginity after intercourse, thereby giving the martyr supreme pleasure.
9. Article 8 of the Hamas Charter.
10. Gama'at, literally "groups," refer to the radical Muslim groups in Egypt who shun the quietist attitude of the Brothers and try to achieve their goals through militant means.
11. Front Islamic du Salut (The Islamic Front for Salvation) is the name of the Algerian fundamentalists who strove to gain power by democratic means and won the elections of 1991, which were later scuttled by the military junta.
12. Front de Liberation Nationale, the Nationalist party of Algeria which led the independence war against the French in the 1960s and ruled the country until the 1991 elections.