

Islam Through the Years - part 2

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In the first part of 'Islam Through the Years' we saw some of Islam's basic beliefs and how it developed up until the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1924. Despite the brevity of this approach it is possible to see that, generally, Islam has remained faithful to its roots. It began as a religion which made no distinction, or division, between the sacred and the secular - all was as one. Therefore Islam has always been a political and reforming religion. Muhammad wished to reform and purify the society in which he lived and this is a concept which is still at the centre of Islam today.

MODERN DEVELOPMENTS IN ISLAM

The Ottoman Empire gradually declined in the 18th. and 19th. centuries and could not compete with the other Imperial powers of the time. Napoleon's invasion of Egypt (1798) and his defeat by British and Ottoman forces in 1801 is often seen as a watershed in history, with the whole world moving into the 'modern era'. The face of Europe and the Middle East was changing as the age of Empire and colonialism grew. Russia also became an important imperial power and took parts of Muslim Central Asia: Azerbaijan (1828) and Bukhara (1868). France and Britain competed with the Ottomans in North Africa and the Middle East. France took Algeria (1847) and Tunisia (1881); Britain occupied Egypt (1882), followed by an Anglo-Egyptian rule of the Sudan ten years later.

This new era dawned during the rule (1805-49) of Muhammad Ali (1769-1849), the Governor (Pasha and Viceroy for the Ottoman Sultan) of Egypt. He modernised his country and fought against colonial rule to re-establish full independence. Egypt has always been a crossroads between East and West, similar to

Turkey's situation, and it was a rich source of independent political and religious thinking at the time. An example of this may be seen in the work of Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), principal of al-Azhar University, Cairo. He believed that it was possible to separate the sacred and the secular, that religion and state did not have to be as they were before. Along with other intellectuals Abduh later founded the 'Salafiya' movement and influenced much of the thinking in the Middle East and Indonesia, especially through their publication 'al-Manar' ('The Lighthouse'). One of Abduh's students, Rashid Rida (1865-1935), inspired 'fundamentalist' movements which rejected all authority save that of the Koran and the Sunna. The restoration of Islam was taken up by 'pan-Islamists', such as Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani (1839-97), through various movements. With Muhammad Abduh he founded the 'al-Hizb al-watani al-hurr' (Free National Party) in 1878, but Al-Afghani was expelled from Egypt the following year.

Countries in which the majorities of the population were Muslim began to assert their independence in different ways. The responses to colonialism varied from the taking up of arms to passive resistance. Radical Muslims, such as in India and Arabia, had attacked lax Muslims before colonial times and they became more active against the ruling powers.

Some newly independent countries tried European-styled government but eventually became one-party states or military dictatorships. Some, such as Turkey the 'Young Turks' (Kemal Ataturk, 1881-1938), tried to reconcile Islam with the modern world and separated religion and politics, becoming secular republics. Others became absolute monarchies (Saudi Arabia)

and still others (Iran under the Pahlavi dynasty from 1925-1979) were secular and pro-Western. For some to modernise meant to Westernise and therefore reject their religious values. This became a catalyst for the 'fundamentalist' Islamic opposition, such as the 'Muslim Brotherhood' in Egypt, to grow. The 'Reformists' believed that colonialism had left a secular state with Western trained leaders who were often remote from their people. These days we tend to forget that most of the Islamic political transition was peaceful.

We should remember that most 'Muslim countries' which were colonised had earlier been independent in their own right. Some had even been allies and long time trading partners with their Western rulers. In the colonial period Islamic rule and identity were often subdued by Western ways and rule of law. Despite this the seeds of the past and how the countries were going to develop were still alive. This was the case in places such as India, Northern Africa, remnants of the Ottoman Empire, parts of Indonesia and Malaysia. At the time of independence (see (1) opposite below) Islamic movements came to the fore again and there

was a reawakening of 'conservative Islam'. In the West this is often called 'Islamic Fundamentalism' (see the box below).

'FUNDAMENTALISTS' - 'ISLAMIST' - 'REFORMISTS'

'The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary' (Volume 1, page 181) defines 'Fundamentalism' as follows: '1923 ... Strict adherence to traditional orthodox tenets (e.g. the literal inerrancy of Scripture) held to be fundamental to the Christian faith: opposed to liberalism and modernism.'

The term 'Fundamentalism' or 'Fundamentalist' has its origins in one of the three main Protestant movements of recent times - the other two being Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism. 'Fundamentalism' grew out of the millenarian movement which developed in the United States in the 1830s and 1840s. Gradually it spread throughout North America and since then and has become a strong movement in different churches, especially in the southern states of the USA.

In the West today we tend to equate 'Fundamentalism' as nothing to do with Christianity, but rather in connection with Islam and fanaticism. It is possible to use the term to describe any religion. Many Muslims see such 'Islamic Fundamentalism' as a searching for, and a return to a pure form of Islam found in the Muslim tradition of changing and purifying corrupt regimes throughout history. To bring about this, there is a continuous struggle to formulate a political ideology which reflects the traditional beliefs. The terms 'Fundamentalists', 'Islamists', 'Extremists' and 'Reformists' are often used, but none really cover the myriad of views held by these groups.



(1) From 1920 onwards various 'Muslim' lands gained independence: Afghanistan (1921), Iran (1925), Saudi Arabia (1932), Iraq (1932), Egypt (1936), Lebanon (1944), Syria (1946), Israel (1948 and Palestinians moved to Jordan, Lebanon and Syria), Indonesia (1949), the Sudan (1956), Malaya (1957), Algeria (1962).

At prayer in Guinea



‘Fundamentalism’, or ‘Islamism’, has its roots in the Arabic opposition to the Ottoman Empire, in the tradition of challenge, and especially the traditional interpretation of Islam by the Wahhabis in present day Saudi Arabia. This was founded by Muhammad ibn Wahhabi (died 1787) and has dominated Saudi Arabia up until today. It was a ‘purification movement’ based on Arab and traditional ideology which grew in reaction to the Ottoman Caliphate, which some saw to be ‘pagan and corrupt’. This encouraged people who were governed by the Caliph to join in and it gradually led to a re-emergence of **Jihad** (see the box below).

The Ottoman Caliph was the ruling political and spiritual authority in Islam since the time of the Prophet, though the line of descent is disputed between the Sunni and Shi’a. When the Caliphate was abolished mainstream Islam had no central authority figure or structure. What has always held Islam together throughout the centuries is the **umma** (ummah), that is the ‘community’, which for a Muslim means worldwide Islam. This concept is deeper than the community of Christian or Jewish faiths and transcends national boundaries. In many respects the strength of **umma** was a barrier to the building of new nations. A witness to

this religious solidarity is seen in the annual **Hajj** (pilgrimage) to Mecca.

The vacuum left by the Caliphate’s demise has been filled by various movements from the different Islamic traditions. One of the most influential is ‘al-Ikhwan al-Muslimum’ (The Muslim Brotherhood)(see the box on page 8) founded by Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949), a Sufi, in Egypt in 1929. It began by trying to get rid of the British secular laws and structures in Egypt. Antipathy to everything Western is part of it and, as it spread through Islam, it has been very influential in the creation of Islamic legal systems in Muslim states. Such movements are not nationalistic but are rather based in religion and so have been taken up by many groups around the world.

‘JIHAD’

Jihad is often translated as ‘Holy War’, but this only gives one aspect of its meaning. It really means to ‘struggle’ or ‘strive’ in the way of God, on a personal and communal level. On both levels it is to fight against evil, crime, corruption, tyranny and oppression in society. Underlying this are the concepts of the ‘lesser Jihad’ (the war against unbelievers) and the ‘greater Jihad’ (the war against evil) which may be interchangeable. In some respects the ‘greater Jihad’, as fighting against evil, unites the two. Some see this conversion of self and society to be carried out by peaceful means, others by force.

PERSONAL LEVEL: Part of this striving entails the personal responsibility which each Muslim has to spread the faith. It also involves a personal purification in following what is right and just in ones life and not following evil inclinations - this would included the ‘Five Pillars of Islam’.

COMMUNAL LEVEL: **Jihad** is a communal obligation (‘fard kifaya’) but can be undertaken by a leader on behalf of his people. The ‘Holy War’ - ‘make war on infidels’ (Koran, sura 9:123) - is waged by Muslims in the defence of Islam in its general advancement, or in spreading the message and reforming the earth. The aim of **Jihad** is not the forced conversion of people, but to gradually gain political power in order to implement Islam in this way.

ORIGINS: Originally the communal **Jihad** was an adaptation of pre-Islamic Bedouin customs which included a code of chivalry. In Islamic tradition the world is divided into two: the ‘sphere of Islam’ (dar al-islam) and the ‘sphere of war’ (dar al-harb). It is believed that Islam will eventually overcome the evil of the world. In a geographical sense, areas which were conquered became ‘dar al-islam’. Muslims who die in this battle are considered to be ‘martyrs’ and are instantly received into paradise. As a ‘Holy War’, **Jihad** was used by some early rulers to justify wars which were waged for political and financial gain. It was also used humanely and to honest ends by other leaders, examples of this may be seen in the treatment of ‘People of the Book’.

PRESENT DAY: In the 19th. and 20th. centuries the concept was used in the struggle against colonialism. Examples of such movements are the Sanusi tariqah (Libya), the Mahdists (Sudan), the Salihi tariqah (Somalia). In recent years **Jihad** has become part of the ‘extremists’ philosophy in their fight against all that is Western and the evil influences to be found in that society. This has often led to violence and is bolstered by the belief in ‘martyrdom’. Both the Western-Capitalist and post-Communist Eastern Worlds are viewed as corrupted. They are in need of redemption and therefore the ‘extremists’ find justification to carry out a modern day **Jihad** against the Infidel.

ISLAM - EAST VERSES WEST?

To many, one of the greatest modern Muslim leaders was Gamel Abdul Nasser (1918-70), of Egypt, who rose to be a leader of the Arab world in 1952. Nasser brought in many reforms in his own country and was also a key figure in the Pan-Arab and Pan-African movements of the time - for example, he was a founder member of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organisation of African Unity. Western powers were wary of Islam and Nasser, and this was further increased when he made a stand against Britain, France and Israel in the Suez crisis of 1956.

The 1970s saw a further reassertion of Islam. In 1973 the ‘Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries’ (OPEC) raised the price of oil which effected the whole world and showed the economic power of the Muslim Middle East. Since then some states have also reacted against the Western banking system and institutions such as the IMF and the way they interfere in a country’s workings. They have countered this by setting up Islamic non-interest-based banking and new local economic

structures and co-operatives. Such attempts, and the vast wealth from oil, were put at the service of the **umma**.

The presence of Israel, and the flash points of the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, was also to become a symbol of the divisions between Muslim and Western powers. 1979 was a year of contrast in the ‘Muslim-Western’ relationship and showed the differences which are possible to find between any political leaders - no matter what their religion. At one end of the scale there was the Camp David peace agreement, between Israel and Egypt, in which Anwar Sadat (1918-81) played such a role (and eventually paid for with his life at the hands of the ‘al-Jihad Islamic’ group) and at the other Ayatollah Khomeini’s revolution in Iran.



The overthrow of the Shah of Iran and the establishment of a militant Islamic Republic under the Ayatollah Khomeini (1979-89), further changed the perception of Islam. The regime condemned virtually everything Western and the anti-Western rhetoric which followed shocked the West, widening the gap between the two even more. There was a series of hostages taken in Iran and Lebanon and in 1989 the death sentence (fatwah) on Salman Rushdie

because of his book 'The Satanic Verses' was promulgated by Ayatollah Khomeini - an issue which has been resolved on a governmental level today, but not between various religious groups.

In the 1980s many Muslim countries were torn between the choice of becoming totally Islamic states or being Western and each dealt with the situation in its own way. Iran and

Libya became more 'fundamentalist' and anti-Western; Turkey and Tunisia separated religion from politics and lent to the West; Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States had Islamic institutions but Western alliances. Similar divisions are reflected in Muslim communities living in various Western countries today. Still beneath the tension was a rapprochement between Islam and the West, the political high point of which - to some - was the Gulf War in 1991 (Western and Islamic countries uniting in a common goal).

The 1990s have brought yet another situation and more uncertainty, especially with the developments in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The position of post-Khomeini Iran has changed and become friendlier to the West. The situation in Afghanistan has still not been resolved. The Soviet invasion and the installation of the Soviet backed regime in Afghanistan (1978-92) caused a prolonged war with the Afghan 'Mujahedin' (mujahadin) who were reportedly CIA trained (see (2) opposite). Since the Soviet withdrawal the Taliban have gradually taken most of the country.

The aim of the Taliban Islamic Movement of Afghanistan (TIMA) is to establish an Islamic state in Afghanistan. The Taliban played a significant role in the battle against Soviet forces, alongside the only opposition which remains in the north of the country. The Taliban were founded by Mullah Mohammed Omar in Kandahar and rebelled against local corrupt warlords. They gained a great following and recruited their soldiers from the Afghan refugees in 'medressahs', Koranic schools, in Pakistan.

With the collapse of the former Soviet Union the mainly Muslim republics, such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kirgizia, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, began to rise. Each state now exercises an important political

and military influence in the region as part of the new Commonwealth of Independent States (C.I.S.)(see (3) on page 10). They have nuclear weapons and so are a great concern to the West.

'ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISTS' IN NORTH AFRICA

Let us now take a look at North Africa and the various faces of Islam which can be found there. 'Islamists' are often taken to be those 'Islamic' groups or politicians who use Islam to further their own ends. Islam then is not a religion but becomes more of a tool. It is difficult for non-Muslims to judge who are the genuine 'believers' in such cases. A possible parallel to this, and in equal complexity, is the way religion has been used by some in Northern Ireland and how a complete outsider would view it. Similarly, if religion is miss-used by

'AL-IKHWAN AL-MUSLIMUM' - THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded by Hasan al-Banna, a Sufi, in Egypt in 1929. Banna was born in Mahmudiya. He graduated as a teacher in 1927 and his job took him to the town of Ismailiya, on the Suez Canal. It was here that Banna, with six other like minded people, began the Muslim Brotherhood.

In 1932 Banna was transferred to Cairo where he continued the work for the Brotherhood. By 1940 there were 500 branches of the organisation, each with a mosque, a school and some sort of club. In the 1940s the Brotherhood was opposed to many of Egypt's constitutional political parties. 1948 saw Brothers go to fight the 'Zionists' in Palestine and also the disbanding of the Movement by Government decree as the former became more radical. Banna was assassinated in Cairo on 13th. February, 1949, and his successor was Hasan Ismail al-Hudaybi.

The Brotherhood saw Egyptian society and the Islam practised at the time as being corrupted and wished to reform them. They wanted to return to the original Islamic order, that is by changing the country into an Islamic State based on Shari'a law. The movement stayed alive and developed from being purely political to being an educative and exemplary force to bring about this change - especially through Jihad.

After the 1952 coup by the 'Free Officers Movement' all political parties were banned. The Brotherhood survived as it was considered to be a religious group and it had been involved in the disturbances which preceded the coup. By now Sayyid Qutb was its head and, for several months, was a consultant to the Officers. Later he and the Brotherhood became critical of the regime when they realised that it did not want to set up an Islamic State. This was the beginning of a strained relationship between the Brotherhood and the Government.

Qutb, together with Yusuf Hawwash, rebuilt the Brotherhood. He preached Jihad against all forms of Westernisation and the secularisation of Egypt. During this turbulent time his writings were connected with three assassination attempts on Nasser. This led to him and 250 other members of the Brotherhood being arrested. He was tried, condemned to death, and executed in 1966.

During the various occasions that Qutb and his followers were imprisoned they developed their beliefs and they gradually became more radical than had Banna. Many other Islamic groups took their lead from Qutb's writings and inspiration. Over the years the Brotherhood has become one of the most influential groups in Sunni Islamic reform - an Islamic 'theology of liberation'.

In early years Banna influenced Sadat and after taking power in 1970 Sadat released all Brotherhood prisoners and collaborated with them. Sadat wanted to bring Islam back and to this end worked with the Brotherhood. Many returned from exile to join in this work though it did not come to fruition. As time went on many different groups split from the Brotherhood, often becoming more militant than their parent, e.g. the Islamic Liberation Group, often taking up arms and fighting against the state in the country where they reside.

It is the name of the Iranian Shia Islamic party founded in 1965. Later it split into two factions: one political the other guerrilla, helped to overthrow the Shah (1979) and fought the Khomeini regime from bases in Iraq.

Picture above: the beautiful ceramic and architectural heritage of Islam



(2) The original meaning of 'Mujahid' (Mujtahidin) is religious scholars who do not follow anything else except what is in the Koran and the Sunna. A 'Mujahid' is also someone who is active and fights for Islam, such as those who fought against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. (continued opposite)



a few should the remaining members of that belief be condemned? (see the box opposite)

North Africa has been a springboard for 'fundamentalist Islam' for many years. It is often said that it has been a place for training and financing extreme groups. Part of the reason for the increase in friction are the many Muslim men who went to fight in the Afghan war against the Soviet forces. When that war ended these soldiers, Muhaedin, returned to their homes bringing with them their ideology and military training. This was a recipe for something to happen and now we see, in broad terms, how some 'Islamic' groups have formed.

Here we have four countries which show the differences which can be found within Islam in the area. Algeria and Egypt are both pro-Western countries which face Islamic extremists. Libya and Sudan are countries which have adopted versions of Islamic statehood and have been isolated by the West. The situations in these countries are all different and very complex due to their history and recent political developments. What they do show is that it is impossible to make absolute statements concerning 'Islam'.

ALGERIA - A COUNTRY IN TURMOIL

Algerian independence (3rd. July, 1962) was born out of a violent war between the National Liberation Front (NLF)(Front de Libération Nationale [FLN] formed in November, 1954) and French settlers (Organisation Armée Secrète [OAS]) and the French forces. It is believed to have claimed the lives of more than 500,000 people and the NLF was the only political party at independence.

Algeria had a secular, one-party government and the country flourished under the NLF socialist policies until oil prices fell in the 1980s. The economy declined and there were civil disturbances when food shortages and unemployment appeared. In February, 1989 a new

constitution was brought in mainly because of these factors. This allowed other political parties to be formed and the country's first multiparty, free elections.

The NLF expected to win the elections but the new Islamic Salvation Front (ISF)(Front Islamique du Salut [FIS] it's armed wing is the Armée Islamique du Salut [AIS]), a 'fundamentalist' religious group, came out on top. They wished to return to traditional Islamic practices - such as Shari'a law - and fought the elections on these issues.

The ISF won the local elections (13th. June, 1990) followed by the national elections (26th. December, 1991). They were assured of a majority in the national government but on 11th. January, 1992, the military stepped in and seized power. The country was then ruled by a Military Council and violence broke out the following month. Emergency rule was imposed and constitutional rights suspended although the violence continued and there were many arrests. The President was assassinated on 29th. June and terrorism set in.

The 'terrorists' began to target and kill intellectuals, entertainers, politicians and journalists. As the atrocities increased the government imprisoned and executed even the moderate ISF leaders. It is also alleged that they used dubious legal tactics and torture. This situation was fertile ground for other extreme organisations to grow. One of the most ruthless of these is the Armed Islamic Group (Group Islamique Armée [GIA]).

The GIA have been implicated in the more brutal atrocities which have taken place in the last few years. Now the attacks are against ordinary people and whole villages have been wiped out - hundreds of people at a time have had their throats cut or have been burnt alive. Some claim that the GIA has been infiltrated by government forces and that it is the latter

SOME 'ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALIST' ('ISLAMIST') GROUPS

Name of Organisation	Founded and Origin	Location and Activities
Abu Nidal Organisation (ANO) (1)	1974 - split from the PLO. Leader: Sabri al-Banna	HQ in Libya. Lebanon, Sudan, Syria, Iraq. Attacks in 20 countries
Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)	1991 - split from Moro National Liberation Front. Leader: Abdurajik Abubakar Janjalani.	Mindanao (southern Philippines) Assassinations, kidnappings and extortion.
Armed Islamic Group (GIA)	1992 - after FIS electoral victory made void.	Algeria. Attacks on civilians, journalists and foreign residents.
al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group)	late 1970s - Spiritual Leader: Shaykh Umar Abd al-Rahman.	Mainly in southern Egypt. Attacks on government officials, opponents and tourists.
Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS)	1987 - split from the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.	Gaza Strip, West Bank, Israel, Jordan. Uses politics and violence, suicide bombings against Israeli targets.
The Harakat ul-Ansar (HUA) (2)	October 1993 - merger of Harakat ul-Jihad al-Islami and Harakat ul-Mujahedin.	Pakistan, Afghanistan, India. Attacks against Indian troops and civilian targets in Kashmir.
Hizballah (Party of God) (3)	Radical Shia Group in Lebanon.	Lebanon, Europe, Africa, N. & S. America. Suicide bombings, hostages.
Jamaat ul-Fuqra al-Jihad (4)	early 1980s - sect. Leader: Shaykh Mubarik Ali Gilani late 1970s - at least two factions. Original Leader: Abud al-Zumar.	N. America the Caribbean and Pakistan. Attack any 'enemies of Islam' in USA. Cairo area (Egypt), Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan. Attacks high level government officials and tourists.
Mujahedin-e Khalq Organisation (MEK or MKO) (5)	1960s - College-educated children of Iranians to counter Western influence in Shah's regime.	France, Iran, Iraq. At present attacks interests of the Iranian clerical regime world wide.
The Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ)	1970s - militant Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.	West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria. Opposed to USA and moderate Arab governments. Suicide bombings against Israeli targets.
Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) (6)	mid 1970s - broke away from PFLP-GC.	Iraq (PLO faction). Attacks against Israel.
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command (PFLP-GC) (7)	1968 - split from the PFLP, opposed to Arafat's PLO. Leader: Ahmad Jibril.	HQ in Damascus, bases in Lebanon, cells in Europe. Attacks into Israel.

Notes: The basic aim of the majority of these organisations is to purify Islam and to establish an Islamic State.

- (1) Abu Nidal Organisation (ANO) is also known as (a.k.a.): Fatah Revolutionary Council, Arab Revolutionary Council, Arab Revolutionary Brigades, Black September, and Revolutionary Organisation of Socialist Muslims.
- (2) The HUA is composed of Pakistanis and Kashmiris, and also Afghan and Arab veterans of the Afghan war.
- (3) Hizballah (Party of God) a.k.a. Islamic Jihad, Revolutionary Justice Organisation, Organisation of the Oppressed on Earth, and Islamic Jihad for the Liberation of Palestine. Allied with Iran and are very anti-Western and anti-Israeli.
- (4) Two factions: parts of the original Al-Jihad Group (or Islamic Jihad) and the Talaa' al-Fateh (Vanguards of Conquest or the New Jihad Group). Latter believed to be led by Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. Spiritual leader of both is Sheikh Umar Abd-al Rahman, same as for al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya. The original Al-Jihad assassinated President Sadat.
- (5) a.k.a. The National Liberation Army of Iran (NLA, the militant wing of the MEK), the People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI), Muslim Iranian Student's Society (front organisation used to garner financial support).
- (6) Later split again into pro-PLO, pro-Syrian, and pro-Libyan factions. Pro-PLO faction led by Muhammad Abbas (Abu Abbas), who became member of PLO Executive Committee in 1984 but left it in 1991. The Abu Abbas faction carried out the attack on the 'Achille Lauro' (1985).
- (7) The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) split from the PFLP in 1969 and it split again into two factions in 1991. One faction was joined by others and has formed the Alliance of Palestinian Forces (APF) and opposes the Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles.

Source: 'Patterns of Global Terrorism', 1997, published by the U.S. Government Department of State.



(3) The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was established in December, 1991, when the U.S.S.R. dissolved. The intention behind it was to have a gradual peaceful transition to independence. The members are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan.



which are responsible for the most extreme attacks.

Tens of thousands have been killed since 1992 and there looks as if there will be no end to the strife. The military reaction to the threat of 'Islamic Fundamentalism' appears to be a cul-de-sac and a political solution seems very unlikely to be found. A concern to neighbouring countries is whether the civil war will spill over to the rest of North Africa, or even into Europe. There have been some incidents in France, giving some cause for apprehension.

EGYPT - A CROSSROADS COUNTRY

Egypt gained independence on 28th. February, 1922, after being a British protectorate. A Constitutional Monarchy, with King Farouk as the ruler, was established but this was overthrown in July, 1952, and Farouk abdicated. A Republic was declared and Gamal Abdel Nasser became its charismatic leader, elected President in 1956. Nasser co-operated with the Soviet Union and undertook large projects, such as the Aswan dam, with their financial backing.

Anwar Sadat succeeded Nasser on his death in 1970. Sadat gradually moved the country's allegiance from the East to the West. The culmination of this transition was the Camp David peace accord, which was signed on 26th. March, 1979. Sadat and Menachem Begin (1913-1992), Israel's Prime Minister, received the Nobel Peace Prize for their work together. Sadat was assassinated by 'Islamic militants' on the 6th. October, 1981. Muhammad Hosni Mubarak (b.1928) succeeded him and he also became the leader of the National Democratic Party and became President on the 14th. October. There followed a clamp down on the various groups of 'Islamic Extremists' in the country.

Mubarak took up Sadat's mantle and continued the alliance with Western powers

and since has been an influential force in helping to keep the peace in the Middle East. While continuing such a foreign policy Egypt, with long established different religious traditions, has also been one of the most liberal of the Arab states. This has not been to the liking of some parts of the country's society.

Egypt has produced Islamic thought of all shades throughout the centuries and the present time is no exception. Since early 1992 the country has been caught up in a battle against groups of 'Islamic militants'. The 'Islamic Jihad' and 'Jamaat al Islamiya' are probably the best known of these organisations. They follow in the tradition of the 'Muslim Brotherhood' and use terrorism as a way to bring down the present government and establish a strict Islamic state.

Most of the support for the 'Islamic' groups is found among the urban poor. The increase of urbanisation in this century, and the poverty it entails, has been a catalyst. There are many slum dwellers who suffer as a result of the country's economic problems. They see the inequality in their society and have few prospects for getting out of their situation. Despite this the 'extremists' are not supported by most Egyptians. There are many other moderate 'Islamic' groups which condemn the 'Extremists' actions and carry out gradual reforms by peaceful methods.

The 'extremists' kill government officials and use terror attacks against tourists as a means to bring down the government. Tourism is a multi-billion Dollar industry upon which the Egyptian economy relies heavily. The terrorists aim is to undermine the economy and foreign investment and so destroy the present order and create a new state. So far the government has been unable to counter these groups despite many of them being executed and imprisoned.

LIBYA - A COUNTRY IN REVOLUTION

Libya became independent in 1951 and was ruled by King Idris until he was overthrown in September, 1969. The leader of the bloodless coup was Lt. Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi (Qaddafi or Gaddafi)(b. 1942). When he was young Gaddafi had been inspired by Nasser's philosophy and the changes which he carried out in Egypt. Gaddafi began a whole series of cultural, economic and religious reforms. He wanted to get rid of all foreign influences and so closed British and American bases in 1970 and nationalised the oil industry. Gaddafi implemented his brand of 'Islamic Socialism' in 1974. In this way the foundations of Libya's bitter relationship with the West, and especially with the United States, were laid.

Gaddafi had set in motion a continual revolution and after much internal transformation Libya was declared a Jamahiriya ('state' or 'the era of the masses') in 1977. Technically this means that the people rule everything and that Gaddafi is no longer Head of State. In practice the regime does not accept any opposition from people within the country or exile living abroad.

Libya has long been linked to international terrorism, though Gaddafi has always denied this. Formerly he has been accused of being involved with the Black Panthers (USA), the IRA, Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Abu Nidal's group. It is claimed that this support has been in the form of arms, training, shelter and finance to many terrorist

organisations. The Gaddafi regime has also been involved in the affairs of various African countries - especially territorial disputes with Chad and Sudan - and has been given much financial aid.

There have been many incidents which have created difficulties between Libya and the West but probably the one which has caused the most animosity is the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie in December, 1988. Two Libyans are accused of having been involved and a tug of war over bringing them to trial has gone on ever since - at the time of writing it looks as if the issue of a trial may be resolved. Because of this and other incidents Libya is now virtually isolated from the rest of the world by UN sanctions and the freezing of the country's assets abroad.

Libya and Gaddafi have been able to keep such a position of power and influence because of the country's vast petroleum revenues.



Gaddafi is viewed in different ways by different nations. He seems to be more acceptable to many African Heads of State, as may be seen from their visits to him over the past two years. The one thing which is sure is that his influence will be felt in both the Arab world and the world at large for a long time to come.

SUDAN - A COUNTRY DIVIDED

Sudan gained independence in 1956 after being under joint British and Egyptian rule since just a hundred years ago, 1898. The country was administered as two territories up until 1946. As preparations for independence got under way the tensions and fears between the two regions grew and the south began a revolt.

The situation is very complicated but the major differences between the north and south are to be found in the people's religions, languages, and cultures. The northern people are mainly Muslim Arabs and those of the south are Animist and Christian Blacks. Southerners have always feared dominance by the northerners. The issues have been further complicated by a number of Muslim northerners joining forces with the south.

The present continuation of violence began in 1983 when the government, led by President Nimeri, redrew the regional boundaries in the south and imposed Shari'a law. The people of the south feared that this was the beginning of a fully Islamic state. A state of emergency was declared in April, 1984, and in reaction to this two battalions of the army broke away to form the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) (or the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement [SPLM]) under the leadership of Colonel John Garang.

There was a popular uprising the next year and later the army removed the Nimeri regime from power and the Transitional Military Council (TMC) took over. The TMC tried to find a solution to the south's problems with

the SPLA but these efforts failed. Civilian rule took over after elections in April, 1986, though voting was postponed in the south's 27 constituencies because of the civil war. Garang was offered a place in the Council of Ministers, but the SPLA refused to co-operate until the Shari'a and state of emergency were lifted. The situation was made worse by a famine which effected two million people in the south.

There have been hopes that the conflict would end, but it still continues. Further famines and wars in neighbouring countries have made the situation more desperate. Almost every year the government troops carry out a major offensive against the rebels in the south. As a result of the war it is currently estimated that there are at least four million displaced people and that, between 1983 and 1993 one million have died from the effects of the fighting and its consequences. At the time of writing (October, 1998) an estimated 2.6 million people are at risk of starvation.

Various relief agencies have been involved in helping the people with the food situation in the south. They have been regularly expelled from the war zones. The churches have also suffered in the south and have been very outspoken about the tragedies which are taking place there. The Catholic Bishops have written many Pastoral Letters in attempts to bring about peace and an end to the people's suffering (see page 27). Despite that the situation does not appear to change and the outside world does not listen a great deal.

Today the Sudan finds itself isolated because of the government's past connections with Iran and accusations against the government of sponsoring international terrorism. Internally the northern government is continually being accused of atrocities, violations of

human rights, and even carrying out a campaign of genocide against the Nuba people in the south.

CONCLUSION

Today Islam does not get 'a good press'. This is mainly due to the activities of 'fundamentalists' and terrorist incidents over the last thirty years or so. Incidents such as the Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam bombings brought this to the fore again in 1998. Osama bin Ladin became the focus of America's search for those who carried out the atrocities. It is questionable whether the retaliatory action of the US forces was justified or has helped to improve the situation - maybe it has only justified and encouraged others to join the 'fundamentalists' in their cause.

The cynical say that formerly the West, and especially the USA, was happy to support the 'Islamists' in Afghanistan, and various 'friendly' Islamic countries in North Africa. They were all a useful defence against Communism when that was the enemy and as Communism declined, Islam has now filled the vacuum left and become the new enemy. The relationship is balanced by the need for trade - oil and arms especially - and where this is carried out there is the ironic possibility that anti-Western groups are being financed and armed by the profits made from those they oppose.

America is now the 'Great Satan', the pinnacle of 'Westernisation' and 'secularisation' to 'Islamists'. The 'Reformists' believe that the world is a unity, the *tawhid* 'oneness' 'or coherence in God'. What non-Muslim countries and religions do destroys this 'oneness'. It is the duty of the 'Reformists' to convince the rest of the world that this is true and to convert it. The means are not important, hence for some the death of any American citizen is a positive action.

Not all Muslims are 'Extremists'. Islam is an inclusive religion, it accepts all. Often an 'Islamic State' will allow peoples of other faiths to practice their beliefs, though non-Muslims remain second class citizens and are not fully integrated. Many Muslims, and Muslim countries, hold on to their religious values of the past while taking advantage of what is modern and using it for betterment of the *umma*. The clash comes in the rejection of what is Western and secular, things which are often taken for granted in the West and seen as neutral and non-corrupting to a non-Muslim. Let us hope that this orthodoxy which we see in Islam does not appear as a block, but rather a means dialogue and of finding understanding.

to be continued in a future issue

Sources: various Encyclopedia & World Wide Web Sites; CIA 'World FactBook'; 'World Facts & Maps'; 'Makers of Modern Africa', 'Africa Today', & 'Africa Who's Who'; 'Passionate Believing' by Bill Lusk; 'Islam: A Very Short Introduction' by Malise Ruthven; 'Vigilance Soudan'; The Guardian; The Independent; The Telegraph.



Picture opposite: helping with the household chores

