



SPECIAL REPORT

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ABOUT THE REPORT

What are the factors, including the roles played by educational systems and the media, that give rise to political violence and terrorism in Pakistan, Egypt, and the occupied Palestinian territories? How do *jihadi* (holy war) groups in Indonesia and Pakistan use Islam to mobilize support? What strategies have Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad employed to attract, retain, and deploy recruits in the West Bank, Gaza, Egypt, and Lebanon, and what motivates their behavior?

Written by Judy Barsalou, director of the Institute's Grant Program, this report summarizes presentations and discussion at a Current Issues Briefing at the Institute on April 17 that featured three current grantees of the Institute: Mustapha Kamal Pasha (American University), Jessica Stern (Harvard University), and Muhammad Muslih (Long Island University). The event presented findings from their grant-funded research projects.

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policies.

Islamic Extremists How Do They Mobilize Support?

Briefly . . .

- Religious extremist groups in the Islamic world are deeply divided along ideological and sectarian lines. Stereotyped images of Islam as a monolithic religion predisposed toward violence do not do justice to the fact that most Muslims are peaceful. Such stereotypes also fail to take into account the multi-faceted complexity of those Islamic groups that choose violence as a political strategy.
- The rise of religious extremism in South Asia and the Middle East has to do primarily with four factors: the absence in much of the Muslim world of democratic, accountable governments, and, indirectly related to this, disputes over contested territory; the failure of governments in some Islamic countries to address problems arising from rapid social, demographic, and economic changes in the last century; financial, logistical, and moral support provided by external actors; and the breakdown within Islam itself of *ijtihad*—the established tradition whereby religious clerics independently interpret the Koran in order to apply Koranic law to diverse and changing circumstances.
- Extremist groups in the Middle East and South Asia display a diversity of motives and methods of operation, reflecting the widely varying circumstances in which they have arisen and operate.
- Individuals join extremist groups for a number of reasons, including the desire to promote specific political goals, as well as in response to a variety of financial, spiritual, and emotional incentives. The groups also attract individuals who, regardless of their social class or economic background, feel they have been humiliated and treated as “second class” by government authorities and others.
- Successful extremist groups have clear missions, rely on a division of labor between relatively young, uneducated “foot soldiers” and better-educated elite operatives, and have developed a variety of fundraising techniques. Many groups rely heavily on the Internet to raise funds, as well as on contributions from foreign governments.
- The ability of these groups to meet their goals depends on four additional factors: access to weapons; mastery of the art of public relations, including use of the media to promote their causes; access to intelligence sources and development of counter-intelligence techniques; and the establishment of “corporate headquarters”—either in a physical area or virtually, via the Internet.

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- Not all religious schools (*madaris*) in Pakistan are “factories of terrorism” as commonly depicted in the Western press. Many of the older *madaris* are long-established centers of learning that have produced serious Islamic intellectuals, while others are providing important educational and social welfare services not available from the government. Similarly, most religious schools in Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and Egypt teach traditional religious values rather than seek to inculcate militancy among the young.

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Factors Underlying Religious Extremism in Pakistan

Mustapha Kamal Pasha began his remarks with general observations about Islam and religious extremism. Muslim communities around the world and in Pakistan are deeply fractured along sectarian and ideological lines. Overlooking this, observers often make binary distinctions between “good” and “bad,” “liberal” versus “illiberal,” and “rational” versus “irrational” Islam that blur the complexity of the situation. Pasha argued, moreover, that the word “terrorism” is often reduced in common discourse to simplistic terms. He suggested, instead, the importance of finding a better way to characterize Islamic extremists, and to focus on terrorism as a phenomenon in its own right. Pasha stressed that terrorism is a particular form of violent activity, not simply a natural corollary of any religion. Terrorists often seek legitimacy through particular religious idioms. But the epithet “Islamic terrorists”—often used as if this is a phenomenon requiring no elaboration—only further reinforces stereotypical images of Islam.

Pasha made a distinction between “old” and “new” Islamists in Pakistan. The new Islamists generally are protagonists of political Islam; they seek to transform politics through religion and religion through politics. Unlike the old Islamists, who were willing to enjoy, at a minimum, peaceful existence with secular politics, the new Islamists are unwilling to brook such an option. Often learning the art of politics from secular modernists, especially the use of print and visual media, the new Islamists wish to transform both the state and civil society in the image of what they believe can be a truly Islamic order.

The rise of the new Islamists, Pasha argued, dates back to the era that began with the Bangladesh war of 1971 and continued with the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) oil embargo. The boom of the Arab oil economies that followed led, significantly, to massive flows of workers (including Pakistan's “best and brightest”) from South Asia to the Gulf in the 1970s and resulted in the weakening of the Pakistani labor movement. Some of the old Islamists became new Islamists—including the group Jama'at Islam, which started as a pro-American faction and then completely reversed itself. But many of the new Islamists emerged from political and sectarian divides reinforced by age and class and exacerbated by the circumstances growing out of the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

New Islamists often are well-versed in the technical and scientific infrastructure of modernity and embrace modern technology but reject cultural modernity. Moreover, unlike the old Islamists, the new Islamists rely heavily on the mass media rather than on traditional political institutions to mobilize support. Nonetheless, while popular support for the new Islamists is sizable, their groups have not garnered more than five percent support at the polls, and they remain small in size.

The principal strategy pursued by new Islamists in Pakistan seeks to “capture” civil society institutions, such as educational institutions and the media, in order to eventually capture the state. This strategy recognizes that the Pakistani state and secular elite are fragile. Authoritarian and inadequate in providing even the most basic services to the neediest, the Pakistani state now focuses its resources primarily on foreign debt-servicing and military expenditures. Indeed, argued Pasha, a leading factor in the rise of religious extremism in Pakistan is the decline of the “developmental,” service-oriented state.

In pursuing the above strategy, the new Islamists have achieved their greatest success by redefining political discourse in Islamic terms and, in the process, have put the secular elite on the defensive. In fact, they had already begun to affect political discourse in Pakistan well before extremist religious schools were established after the onset of the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan in late 1979. In an effort to recapture lost ground, the state and secular elite have increasingly “Islamicized” their rhetoric, thus paving the way for wider support for the new Islamists. New Islamists now also dominate Pakistan’s institutions of higher education.

The media have played a role in this process. While the extremist groups have achieved the greatest boost from the Urdu-language media, support for them can also be found in Pakistan’s English-language media. Extremist groups have also achieved significant success in their efforts to ban alcohol consumption and confine women to the private domain of their homes, where they are subject to the authority of their male relations.

Turning to a discussion of religious schools (*madaris*) in Pakistan, Pasha argued that too often they are simplistically characterized as “factories of terrorism.” In fact, there are three broad categories of *madaris*. The first are the long-established centers of learning that have produced serious Islamic intellectuals. A second category of *madaris* consists of those schools that have played an important role in providing educational and social welfare services to Pakistan’s poorest citizens not being adequately served by Pakistan’s government. Only a third set of *madaris*, largely a product of the conditions surrounding the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, can be properly categorized as producing *jihadi* militants.

The latter schools have several characteristics in common. They are run by what Pasha described as “lumpen intellectuals,” mostly following a conservative Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, especially with regard to questions relating to the status of women. He noted that many of these individuals, and many leaders of extremist Islamic groups, were trained in scientific fields but have little understanding of Western culture, aside from how to manipulate the technology it has produced. In creating their own schools, these “lumpen intellectuals” took advantage of the departure in the 1970s and 1980s of some of Pakistan’s best-trained citizens who sought better-paying jobs in the Gulf. They also benefited from the “kalashnikov culture” that resulted from the proliferation of arms and foreign funding (especially from Saudi Arabia and the United States) in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

More broadly, extremist *madaris*, and the rise of religious extremism in Pakistan, reflect the breakdown of *ijtihad*—the established tradition whereby religious clerics render independent interpretations of the Koran in order to apply Koranic law to diverse and changing circumstances. Though in earlier periods a place for lively internal debate, Islamic societies today reveal a general sense of intellectual defensiveness as reflected by the extremist *madaris*, which tend to be doctrinaire in matters theological. The creation of these *madaris* also demonstrates rising frustrations marked by the widening gap between a very visible Muslim elite in Pakistan that has benefited from the globalized world economy and those left on the fringes.

Mobilizational and Organizational Strategies in South Asia

Turning the discussion to the broader region, Jessica Stern concentrated on two issues: key incentives for individuals to join *jihadi* groups, and organizational strategies involved in building effective *jihadi* movements. She noted that her fieldwork has found some common elements among religious extremists of different faiths around the world.

According to Stern, individuals may join extremist groups for a variety of reasons, including a desire to achieve specific political objectives such as sovereignty over disputed territory. Emotional incentives may also play an important part. Members of

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extremist groups often report on the “glamour” of being members of such groups, and of becoming “addicted” to the adrenaline-driven excitement of their activities, which they say becomes a way of life. Unknown, lower-class youth can become famous through their militant actions, with thousands turning out for their funerals when they are “martyred.” Members also actively recruit their friends into these groups. But Stern emphasized that the single most common emotional feature among *jihadi* militants, regardless of their rank, is their feeling that they have been humiliated and treated as “second class” by government authorities and others—even those *jihadis* from relatively rich countries or advantaged backgrounds.

Spiritual incentives drive some to join these groups. Leaders of extremist groups often articulate political, economic, or social grievances—such as disputes over land—in spiritual terms. Some train their recruits from early on to focus on the “real life,” that is, the next life, and on the redemptive value of membership in the group. Citing Hafez Said, a former head of Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan, Stern said that the group likes to “get recruits as young as eight years old in order to train them to focus on the spirit of sacrifice.”

Financial incentives can also be significant. Successful groups pay their recruits well, and many members talk about the importance of money as a motivating factor. One member of Harakat al Mujahiddeen, a group based in Pakistan, mentioned, for example, that he would take a severe salary cut if he left the group for regular employment. A mid-level manager in Lashkar-e-Taiba, another group based in Pakistan, said that he earns seven times what he would in the civilian sector, and that the financial incentives for top leaders are significantly greater. Families of dead “martyrs” sometimes receive financial rewards or better housing. Group leaders also recognize opportunity costs in their salary structures. Stern noted that trial transcripts of the U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania revealed that a Sudanese member of al Qaeda, Jamal al-Fadl, was furious when he learned that key Egyptian operatives were receiving up to three times as much as he was. According to al-Fadl, Osama bin Laden’s response was that the Egyptians could travel and had other career options.

Stern also outlined the following organizational requirements of successful extremist movements in South Asia. First, they develop what, in essence, are mission statements in which they articulate their goals. Some, such as al Qaeda, may amend their mission statements over time to appeal to a broader audience—as Osama bin Laden did by only recently addressing the conflicts between the Arabs and Israel and in Kashmir.

Groups also need access to weapons. Often they obtain them on the black market or through underworld connections. One Pakistani informant, for example, reported that over 50 percent of his group’s weapons were purchased from organized crime groups in India and from Indian military personnel.

As in other organizations, extremist religious organizations rely upon a division of labor—in this case between foot soldiers (expendable young recruits) and better-educated elite operatives. In Pakistan, the former are often plucked from *madaris*. In Indonesia, Laskar Jihad recruits young university students for the latter. When the Egyptian group Islamic Jihad merged with al Qaeda, it provided a ready-made officer corps to Bin Laden.

Fundraising is essential to the success of these groups, which rely on a variety of different strategies to raise money. Some, such as Laskar Jihad, which has a very sophisticated web site, raise a substantial portion of their funds on the Internet. Others admit to smuggling drugs through Afghanistan to raise funds. Some groups display wounded members at Friday prayers to raise money. While such groups as Laskar Jihad can be seen everywhere on the streets of Jakarta raising money, this strategy has more to do with public relations—to raise their profile in the community—than with serious fundraising; most groups report that they raise only a small proportion of their budgets from ordinary people.

Funding from abroad is also a significant source of support for some groups. One informant from Harakat al Mujahiddeen, for example, said that 60 percent of its funding comes from abroad—from speeches given during the *hajj* (pilgrimage) in Saudi Ara-

bia and from wealthy donors in the Arabian Peninsula. In the past, the Saudi government has also been a source of significant funding for extremist South Asian groups.

Intelligence and counter-intelligence are also important to operations of extremist groups. Members of Pakistani groups, for example, told Stern of buying intelligence from the Indian intelligence agency known as the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). Training manuals captured from al Qaeda teach their members how to use sophisticated techniques to disappear into enemy territory, for example.

Stern acknowledged that some of the groups she interviewed mentioned significant support from Pakistan's intelligence agency (Inter-Service Intelligence or ISI). Even though the leadership of ISI has changed since the September 11 terrorist attacks against the United States, there is still much sympathy within the ISI for extremist groups.

Good public relations are key to the success of these groups. In an effort to build support, many adroitly use the media and other vehicles to create a high profile. Stern mentioned, for example, that one Pakistani group eagerly published in their newspaper her testimony to Congress about the group, even though she described them as a terrorist organization.

Extremist groups also need physical space—"corporate headquarters"—within which they can organize their operations. Until recently, the failed state of Afghanistan provided such a place for al Qaeda. But when such locations are closed down to these groups, they sometimes attempt to develop "networks of networks"—leaderless networks organized through the Internet.

Stern noted that efforts by the Pakistani government to limit extremist religious groups have largely been ineffectual. In the recent past, some 2,000 extremists were briefly imprisoned, but the government was able to bring charges against only a few. The government moved to close down groups' bank accounts only after many had already moved their funds. Some leaders have gone into "hiding" but were visible enough that Stern still was able to contact them. Under the pressure of outside forces, and in response to internal dissension, groups often splinter and re-form, which makes them even harder to control.

Extremist Groups in Egypt, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territories

Turning the discussion to the Arab Middle East, Muhammad Muslih emphasized that the ideologies, agendas, methods of recruitment, and activities of different extremist groups have varied considerably from one group to the next and over time. But throughout most of the Arab world, he argued, the most important underlying cause of terrorism is humiliation and repression by authoritarian governments, or in the case of the Palestinian territories and Lebanon, the foreign occupation of land.

The former problem, Muslih suggested, can best be overcome by the development of democratic, accountable governments in Muslim countries, which will help undermine the appeal of extremist groups and encourage radical Islamists to refrain from violence. The revelations of the leaders of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group) in Egypt confirm this point of view. A careful reading of the statements of this group's leaders in *Al-Ahram al-Duwali* (published in Cairo in February/March 2002) clearly indicates the role of humiliation and state violence in pushing the group toward violence in the 1980s and 1990s. As for the latter problem, terrorism in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, Muslih suggested that it can only be resolved by ending occupation.

According to Muslih, all the extremist groups throughout the region have been deeply influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization established in Isma'iliyya, Egypt in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna. The works of al-Banna, particularly his letters and speeches—including, most notably *Da'watuna Fi Tawrin Jadid* (Our Call in a New Phase) and *Rasa'il al-Shahid Hasan al-Banna* (The Letters of the Martyr Hasan

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al-Banna)—remain among the standard references for Islamic thinkers and activists. And the works of Sayyid Qutb, particularly his revolutionary seven-volume interpretation of the Koran (*Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*, or *Under the Sovereignty of the Koran*) and *Ma'alim Fil-Tariq* (*Landmarks on the Road*), had an even deeper impact on the thought and practice of radical Islamists. Also Khalid Muhammad Khalid's earlier works, written in the early 1960s, particularly *Min Huna . . . Nabda'* (*From Here . . . We Start*), left a deep imprint on these movements.

Muslih emphasized that, originally, al-Banna recognized the legitimacy of the Egyptian state, accepted the notion of dialogue with the British colonial administration, and agreed to live in peace with the government even though it was not based on Islamic principles. But after Qutb and other Egyptian Islamists were tortured in Egyptian prisons, they began to advocate violence as a political strategy. Thus, argued Muslih, torture, humiliation, and violations of civil liberties went a long way toward radicalizing the Islamists' instruments of political action. Ayman al-Zawahiri, a principal leader of al Qaeda from Egypt, has indicated that the torture of Islamic activists in Egyptian jails instilled in them the belief in violence, and also made them angry and determined to seek revenge through violence, not only against the Egyptian state, but also against the major supporter of that state—the United States.

Over time, according to Muslih, the Muslim Brotherhood produced many splinter groups and factions. Among those worth mentioning are a number that emerged in the 1980s: Al-Najuna min al-Nar (*Those Who Are Saved from Hell*), al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group), al-Takfir wal-Hijra (*Unbelief and Emigration*), and Tanzim al-Fanniyya al-Askariyya (the Military Technical Organization). However, the centrist core of the Muslim Brotherhood remains largely focused on domestic issues related to the social code (such as the dress and behavior of women) and the question of governance in an Islamic state.

Muslih noted that this centrist core did not hesitate to enter into political alliances with secular and even leftist groups in Egypt. A major splinter group, al-Jihad al-Islami (*Islamic Jihad*), itself split into two groups around the mid-1990s, with one faction seeking refuge outside Egypt, allying itself with al Qaeda, and the other remaining in Egypt. In 1995, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, which operates outside Egypt, switched its focus from fighting "apostate" leaders and individuals in the Arab world to fighting Americans, Jews, and Christians. One of the few groups that developed a detailed framework for the creation of an Islamic state is Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami (the Islamic Liberation Party). Sheikh Taqiyyu al-Din al-Nabhani established this group, which appeals mostly to merchants and other members of the middle class, in Jerusalem in 1952.

Circumstances differ in Lebanon and in the Palestinian territories, according to Muslih, and extremist groups there reflect these differences. The Lebanese group Hezbollah (which originally called itself Islamic Jihad) was initially motivated by the deprived social and political status of the Shia community in Lebanon as well as by the 1979 success of the Islamic revolution in Iran. Until the death of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, one of the group's main goals was to establish an Islamic state in Lebanon. Thereafter, this motive changed and like the Palestinian groups— Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad—became a national liberation movement principally interested in fighting Israeli occupation in Lebanon and extending help to the Palestinian Intifada whenever possible. Hezbollah since the late 1980s has recognized the legitimacy of the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic Lebanese state, and has transformed itself into a political party that has won representation in the Lebanese parliament.

Muslih stressed that there are nuanced differences between Hezbollah and Hamas with respect to peace with Israel. For example, in its statements and published literature Hezbollah calls for the total liberation of *all* original Mandate Palestine, as well as for the recovery of the Shab'a Farms area, which it claims belongs to Lebanon, and the return of the Golan to Syria. However, the Palestinian group Hamas, according to Muslih, is predisposed to accept a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza with

Jerusalem as its capital, although Hamas views such a solution to be a *hudna* (truce) and not necessarily a final peace with the Jewish state. Like Hezbollah, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad insists on the total liberation of Mandate Palestine—what today is Israel and the Palestinian territories.

According to Muslih, it is significant that, like the Muslim Brotherhood in its early days, Hamas has been willing to co-exist with the Palestinian Authority, and on several occasions has talked about accepting a cease-fire with Israel. In other words, unlike Sayyid Qutb, who wrote that Egypt and the Arab world were in a state of *Dar al-Harb* (the “realm of war” where governments must be overthrown because they are non-Islamic and societies must be rebuilt from scratch along Islamic lines), Hamas does not consider the Palestinian territories to be in *Dar al-Harb*. Qutb also wrote that the Koran is a “sword” that has universal application to fight infidels everywhere, but Hamas literature does not reflect this perspective. Instead, although mobilized in the name of Islam and as offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood, both Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad remain almost exclusively focused on the national struggle between the Palestinians and the Israelis and on the liberation of Palestinian territory from Israeli occupation.

It is not surprising then that, from a theological point of view, the literature and the statements of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad do not expound *jihad* as a religious concept to the same degree as the literature produced by the Muslim Brotherhood, Hezbollah, al Qaeda, and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. According to Muslih, the writings of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad are not preoccupied, as were those by Sayyid Qutb, with *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) or with an in-depth analysis of theological and governance questions.

While Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas have important ties to Iran, both remain within the Sunni Islamic tradition, argued Muslih. Yet Islamic Jihad is closer ideologically to Iran than Hamas because the latter established more direct relations with Tehran when Israel deported some 400 Hamas members and sympathizers into Marj al-Zuhur, in southern Lebanon, in December 1992 and Iran came to their political and financial aid. Overall, the *marji'yya* (frame of reference) of Hamas is very close to that of the global Muslim Brotherhood, while that of Palestinian Islamic Jihad is deeply influenced by the *marji'yya* of Iran. Moreover, Hamas remains privately much more critical of Iran's Shia traditions than Palestinian Islamic Jihad. (Sunni and Shia Islam are the two main branches of Islam, with Sunni Muslims being in the majority.)

Compared to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, according to Muslih, Hezbollah remains ideologically closer to Iran, because Hezbollah has its roots in Lebanon's Shia community. Iran, along with rich Lebanese and non-Lebanese Shia families, is the greatest source of funds for Hezbollah. Iran reportedly also provides unspecified amounts of funding for Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

In recruiting supporters, there are significant differences among the Palestinian and Lebanese groups, argued Muslih. Hezbollah draws tens of thousands of supporters annually to its religious parades marking the Ashura celebration, and uses the parades and a wide array of social services to attract supporters. It also runs a sophisticated and influential TV station, al-Manar.

Muslih suggested that Palestinian Islamic Jihad is much more secretive in its recruitment and operations than Hamas. Nonetheless, the two Palestinian organizations report that since conditions deteriorated significantly with the reoccupation of many Palestinian urban centers by Israel in the first quarter of 2002, they now receive more requests from individuals who want to carry out suicide missions than they have the resources to train and equip.

Unlike South Asia, where religious schools play an active role in indoctrinating the young in extreme religious beliefs, there are no comparable schools in the Palestinian territories, according to Muslih. Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas are active in schools and mosques and in providing social services to the poor, but do not invest in the full-time religious training of children. Clothed in the language of Islam, the

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Clothed in the language of Islam, the ideological frameworks of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and Hezbollah remain fundamentally nationalistic and focused on the struggle against Israel. Religion is more of a garb than a guide to action.

The struggle against extremism will not be won until the countries in which extremists thrive become truly democratic, and until Islamic activists are no longer humiliated and oppressed for their beliefs.

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Conclusion

While many religious extremist groups in South Asia and the Middle East share common organizational features, the circumstances that give rise to them and that motivate their actions vary widely from one setting to another. Among Palestinian groups, for example, the struggle against Israeli occupation is paramount. Egyptian groups, by contrast, are focused primarily on questions related to the social code and to internal governance of the country. Pakistani groups are motivated by a variety of goals, including the desire to control Kashmir.

There is no single cause for the rise of religious extremism in the Muslim world. It reflects, perhaps most of all, the failure to date of secular modernism to develop good governance in most Muslim countries. All the speakers agreed that the struggle against extremism will not be won until the countries in which extremists thrive become truly democratic, and until Islamic activists are no longer humiliated and oppressed for their beliefs. In the case of the Palestinian territories, extremists groups will continue to be influential so long as the struggle against Israel continues. “Law and order approaches” to the problem of extremism generally are ineffectual because they offer no positive alternatives to the disaffected young who swell the ranks of extremist groups.

Another prime factor in the rise of extremism is the failure of many governments in the Muslim world to address the overwhelming challenges of development arising from rapid social, demographic, and economic changes over the past century. It is no accident that many of the extremist groups in Pakistan, for example, are centered in mid-sized towns whose populations have grown exponentially in recent decades because of rural-to-urban migration. Of the 140 million people living in Pakistan today, most are poor and susceptible at some level to the blandishments of extremist groups, who claim to have answers to questions that their own government has unsuccessfully addressed or simply ignored. Throughout the Muslim world, extremist religious groups tend to be most influential in locations where local governments are the least effective in addressing developmental challenges.

External forces have also played a significant role in creating extremist groups in the Middle East and South Asia. Stern pointed to the role of funding from the United States and Saudi Arabia, as well as logistical support from the ISI, in the rise of extremist groups in Afghanistan. In the Arab world, according to Muslih, the “literate class” is highly critical of the U.S. government for supporting oppressive Arab states.

A fourth, and final, factor in the rise of extremist groups relates to a deeper crisis within Islam itself. The decline of the centuries-old tradition of *ijtihad*—the ever-evolving interpretation of the Koran by religious clerics—has led to rigid and narrow interpretations of religious precepts. Muslim societies must engage in a process of genuine self-examination and grapple with the complicated question of why they have failed to build stable religious and other institutions capable of helping their societies adapt to a rapidly changing world.



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