

TRANSNATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGIES

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What motivates Islamic fundamentalist revolutionaries? Like Marxist-Leninist ones before them, they are often motivated by localized concerns: Palestinian anger at living under Israeli occupation, Chechen anger at living under Russian occupation, as well as similar resentments in Kashmir, Xinjiang, and elsewhere. Similarly, revolutionaries—whatever their ideology—are motivated by opposition to what they consider to be illegitimate, authoritarian governments supported by foreign powers.

The attraction of transnational revolutionary ideologies such as Marxism-Leninism during the Cold War and Islamic fundamentalism now is that they link many localized concerns together into an overarching narrative that points to a common cause for their grievances, identifies common allies, and proposes a common solution. Transnational revolutionary ideologies also have the advantage of being able to appeal to a wide variety of people. Marxism-Leninism was open to anyone irrespective of his/her ethnic or even class background (indeed, this ideology which purported to speak on behalf of the poor often had great appeal to the children of the rich). Islamic fundamentalism, of course, seeks to appeal just to Muslims. Muslims alone, however, are obviously an extremely large segment of the world's population. In addition, as several cases since 9/11 have shown, there are non-Muslims who have been converted not only to Islam but to the Islamic fundamentalist revolutionary ideology as well.

Marxism-Leninism identified the common cause for so many localized grievances as being "imperialism"—especially of the American variety. Islamic fundamentalists similarly identify the common cause of the Muslim world's many localized grievances as "Zionists and Crusaders"—a code phrase meaning Israel and the United States. Why Muslims in general would blame these two actors for the plight of the Palestinians is not difficult to understand. The United States is also seen as the foreign power "propping up" many authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world. For Muslim grievances over other localized conflicts such as Chechnya, Kash-

mir, and Xinjiang, however, an American (much less Israeli) connection may appear to be less obvious. Hardcore Islamic fundamentalist revolutionaries, however, have no difficulty in finding one. For them, it is enough to point out that the United States is doing nothing to help the Muslim side in any of these conflicts. Instances of American support for Muslims against non-Muslims—such as in Bosnia and Kosovo—may seem a little more complicated for Islamic fundamentalists to explain in terms of their worldview, but it has not proved to be since, as Olivier Roy noted, it simply did not "matter to the radicals that many U.S. interventions were made on behalf of Muslim populations."

A transnational revolutionary movement also provides adherents with powerful allies. During the Cold War, Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movements received material and other support not only from the USSR, but often from various East European communist states, Cuba, Vietnam, and other Third World Marxist revolutionary regimes or movements. A less formal mechanism has been created for supporting Islamic fundamentalist revolutionary movements. Wealthy patrons in the Gulf and elsewhere provide money either directly to individual revolutionary movements (or individuals), or to an organization such as Al Qaeda, which provides money, training, logistics, and other support for various movements or operations in many places.

One difference between the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movement of the past and the Islamic revolutionary movement now is that while the former was led by a powerful state (the USSR), the latter is not. Indeed, after the downfall of the Taliban regime at the end of 2001, not a single Muslim government claims to sponsor Al Qaeda. It is clear, though, that important elements within several Muslim states—such as certain Saudi charities as well as some Pakistani military and intelligence officers—have been assisting Al Qaeda and its affiliates. And the Saudi and Pakistani cases demonstrate that this sort of support for Al Qaeda occurs even in countries that are cooperating with the United States in the "war on terrorism."

The ultimate aim revolutionaries pursue, of course, is not simply the destruction of existing governments and social orders, but their replacement by something that they deem to be superior. For the Marxist-Leninists, the ultimate aim was to see socialist revolution spread throughout the world. While they did not get anywhere near this goal, Marxist-Leninist revolutionary regimes did come to power in many countries, including ones in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. But instead of creating one giant socialist superstate, the Marxist-Leninists appeared content with creating an alliance of socialist states, albeit one that was led (with a few notable exceptions) by the Soviet Union, which was also one of the two superpowers during the Cold War. In addition, the Marxist-Leninists believed that they could create not only a more just and equitable economic system than that in the West, but a more productive and efficient one as well. And even if the achievement of this aim appeared elusive at any given time, Marxist-Leninists exuded confidence that they could and would achieve it.

The ultimate aim of Islamic fundamentalist revolutionaries, by contrast, is not just the replacement of existing Muslim governments by Islamic revolutionary ones, but the unification of existing Muslim countries in a revival of the caliphate—the single state that encompassed the Muslim world in the early days of Islam. While not even the most populous Muslim state—Indonesia—is particularly strong vis-a-vis the West, the resurrection of the caliphate would make the Muslim world a superpower (perhaps even *the* superpower). Unlike the Marxist-Leninists, the Islamic fundamentalists do not seem interested in building a productive economy to rival that of the West. Instead, they appear content to earn money principally through selling oil—albeit at a much higher price than it sells for now (in a December 2004 tape, Osama bin Laden argued that the price of oil "should be" \$100 per barrel), and buying whatever sophisticated goods and services they need from others. Instead of progressive, the social order that the Islamic fundamentalists seek to create (indeed, have already created through intimidation in many Muslim countries) is a traditional one, in which women in particular are largely forced out of employment and education.

How do transnational revolutionary movements achieve their aims? During the Cold War, the typical Marxist-Leninist revolution in a Third World country consisted of a guerrilla uprising that was aided to a greater or lesser degree by the USSR and other Marxist states. The revolution was aimed not at achieving a quick military victory, but at wearing down (or exploiting the lack of) Western support for the targeted

regime, as well infiltrating its armed forces. After years of seeming inactivity, the denouement of the revolution often unfolded very quickly. Not all Marxist-Leninist revolutions, of course, occurred precisely in this manner: each case had its own individual peculiarities.

Islamic fundamentalist revolution has occurred in a number of ways: urban uprising in Iran, coup d'etat in Sudan, and the remarkable rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan. In recent years, the hallmark action undertaken by Islamic revolutionaries has been the suicide bombing, often on a spectacular scale as on 9/11. Osama bin Laden himself has stated that the aim of these operations is to drive America and the West out of the Middle East. Once this is done, he appears to believe that the downfall of existing Muslim governments and the rise of the caliphate will occur quickly.

Whether suicide bombings launched by Islamic fundamentalists will prove as effective as some of the guerrilla wars waged by Marxist-Leninists in ending Western support for regimes targeted by revolutionaries remains to be seen. In the short run, however, this tactic backfired since the 9/11 suicide attacks were quickly followed by the American-led intervention in Afghanistan. It also appears that some Islamic fundamentalists have become increasingly adept at guerrilla warfare, as in Chechnya, post-Taliban Afghanistan, and post-Saddam Iraq.

Revolutionaries, though, have faced important obstacles both in the Cold War era and now. One of these is that Western public support for counter-revolutionary efforts cannot always be successfully undermined. The collapse of French public support for counter-insurgency efforts in Indochina and Algeria, of British public support for such efforts in South Yemen, of American public support for such efforts in Indochina, of Portuguese public support for such efforts in Lusophone Africa, and of Soviet public support for such efforts in Afghanistan contributed to the victory of revolutionaries in all of these countries during the Cold War era. By contrast, such a collapse of public support did not occur even during long, drawn out counter-insurgency efforts that America undertook in the Philippines after World War II and in El Salvador in the 1980s; that Britain undertook in Greece after World War II, in Malaya, from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, and in Oman from 1965 to 1975; and that France undertook in Chad in the early 1980s. Nor did the (often quite vigorous) attempts at revolution succeed in any of these cases.

The victory of Islamic fundamentalist revolutionaries in Iran in 1979 and in Afghanistan in the 1990s was obviously facilitated by the American refusal to become

militarily involved in the former and the Soviet withdrawal from the latter. Bin Laden himself has frequently taken credit for forcing the Soviets to withdraw from Afghanistan, and has expressed the firm belief that he could force the United States to withdraw from the Muslim world even more easily still. His optimism on this score was based on the withdrawal of American and other Western peacekeepers from Lebanon in the early 1980s and Somalia in the early 1990s after casualties were inflicted upon them. The fact that these were intended as peacekeeping missions and not military interventions made no difference to bin Laden, for he perceived them as being equivalent. But if, as seems likely, bin Laden anticipated that the 9/11 attacks on the United States would induce the American public to demand a U.S. withdrawal from the Middle East, he clearly miscalculated. Not only did the American public support the intervention in Afghanistan that overthrew the Taliban regime, but also the intervention in Iraq that overthrew Saddam Hussein. How long the American public will support counter-insurgency efforts in Iraq's "Sunni triangle" is in the process of being tested. But if American public support for this continues, it will not be unique: despite the costs, the public in India, Israel, and Russia continue to support interventions against Islamic rebels in Kashmir, the occupied Arab territories, and Chechnya.

Status quo powers, though, are not the only obstacle that revolutionaries face. Another important one has been division within their own ranks. The Marxist-Leninist revolutionary wave was rent by the Sino-Soviet split, which resulted in the division of many communist parties into pro-Moscow and pro-Beijing factions. Other rifts within the Marxist-Leninist world included those between the USSR and Yugoslavia, Yugoslavia and Albania, the USSR and Albania, China and Vietnam, and Vietnam and Khmer Rouge-ruled Cambodia. The Arab nationalist revolutionary wave was also plagued by rifts, including those between Egypt and Syria, Egypt and Iraq, and Syria and Iraq. There have not yet emerged all that many Islamic fundamentalist regimes. However, two of them—Iran and Taliban-ruled Afghanistan—nearly went to war in 1998. Iran also tacitly supported the American-led intervention that overthrew the Taliban.

Although the Islamic Republic of Iran was the first modern Islamic revolutionary regime, many Sunni fundamentalists have expressed hostility toward Shias. But in addition to the persistence of age-old Sunni-Shia differences, there have been serious rivalries among the Shia fundamentalists (such as between Tehran and certain Iraqi ayatollahs) and between Sunni fundamentalists (such as on occasion between the Islamic regime in

Sudan and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood). After 9/11 the fact emerged that there had been serious tensions between the Taliban and Al Qaeda despite what appeared to be a tight alliance between them. Although Egypt's Gama'a al-Islamiya had launched numerous violent attacks up until 1997, it has since then renounced violence as being counterproductive and has criticized Al Qaeda for fostering it.

We cannot know for certain whether there will be more Islamic fundamentalist regimes in the future, or whether rifts will emerge among them if there are. It appears, though, that transnational revolutionary movements, such as Marxism-Leninism and Islamic fundamentalism, are vulnerable to this problem. Being non-democratic, those who espouse these ideologies usually uphold a select group or individual as the supreme authority for the transnational movement as a whole. But those who manage to seize power through revolution in any given country are rarely inclined to surrender that power to someone abroad, even if they share the same ideology. In addition, despite their adherence to a transnational revolutionary ideology, the leaders of individual revolutionary regimes inherit much (if not all) the previous regime's negative view of the country's immediate neighbors. Revolutionary regimes espousing more or less the same ideology may arise in neighboring states, but if those neighboring states were opposed to each other previously, their adherence to a common ideology rarely results in their relations improving. Indeed, this may contribute to their deterioration.

Another obstacle that transnational revolutionary ideologies encounter is opposition from other political (including other revolutionary) ideologies. Marxism-Leninism, for example, made little headway in the Arab world due to the popularity of Arab nationalism. While the Soviet Union allied with several Arab nationalist regimes, these routinely suppressed (to put it mildly) Arab communist parties—some of which, as in Iraq, were quite large. Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution also gave rise to an international Islamic revolutionary movement that successfully competed with Marxism-Leninism for recruits throughout the Muslim world, including in the Muslim regions of the former Soviet Union.

Islamic fundamentalism has run into similar opposition. This is not the place to debate what was cause and what was effect. There is no doubt, however, that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism (as well as Palestinian nationalism) in the occupied Arab territories has been associated with heightened Jewish nationalism and even fundamentalism. The imposition of the Sharia as the basis of law in Sudan during the 1980s served to re-

ignite the insurgency in the southern part of that country waged by non-Muslim (mainly Christian) tribes. Similarly, increased Muslim violence in Kashmir and elsewhere in India has occurred alongside increased Hindu fundamentalism. Just the fear of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Bosnia and Kosovo contributed to the rise of virulent Serbian nationalism. Even without assistance from external powers such as the U.S., it is clear that these forces are as determined to oppose Islamic fundamentalism as Islamic fundamentalism is to oppose them.

Can transnational revolutionary movements be halted or reversed? The Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movement has largely collapsed. Will something similar be the fate of the Islamic fundamentalist revolutionary wave? While this cannot be foretold, understanding how the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movement collapsed may tell us something about how the Islamic fundamentalist one might do so.

During the Cold War, America, Britain, and France waged counterinsurgency efforts in several countries in order to halt the spread of Marxist revolution to them. As was mentioned earlier, these three countries lost some of these wars, but they won others. But even those that they won in some countries did not halt the spread of Marxist-Leninist revolutionary activity to others. Nor, with the sole exception of tiny Grenada, did America or any other Western country forcibly oust a Marxist-Leninist regime during the Cold War once it came to power. America and the West contained Marxism-Leninism, but they did not defeat it.

What led to the collapse of Marxism-Leninism was not that it was defeated from the outside, but that it became discredited on the inside. Even more crucial than the loss of faith in the ideology at the mass level was the loss of faith in it at the elite level under Gorbachev. Marxism-Leninism claimed that countries adhering to it would surpass the capitalist West economically. Gorbachev understood that the capitalist West and even the capitalist Third World were becoming more and more powerful compared to the USSR and its allies. He understood that drastic change would be needed to reverse this process. But instead of providing solutions, the changes he made only served to exacerbate economic problems as well as to accelerate pent-up non-Russian nationalisms. Because Gorbachev was unable to resolve these problems, they spiraled out of control to the point where the Marxist-Leninist system collapsed.

Similarly, although the United States and its allies successfully ousted the Taliban regime from Afghanistan, they have not defeated Islamic fundamentalism either generally or even in Afghanistan. Nor has the

American/British intervention in Iraq, which ousted Saddam Hussein, brought the defeat of Islamic fundamentalism any closer. Far from discrediting this ideology, the defeat of an Islamic fundamentalist regime in Afghanistan and that of a Muslim (albeit not a fundamentalist) one in Iraq may have only served to enhance the appeal of Islamic fundamentalism to many Muslims. Nor does it appear likely that the occupation of even more Muslim countries would change this.

If, as with Marxism-Leninism, it is doubtful that Islamic fundamentalism will be defeated from without, can it be discredited from within? Again, it is impossible to predict when, or even if, something like this might occur. There are signs, however, indicating that this has begun to happen:

- The Taliban, for all its internationalist revolutionary rhetoric, was a predominantly Pushtun movement, which forcibly extended its domination over most of the rest of Afghanistan's non-Pushtuns. Part of the reason why the American-led intervention in Afghanistan was able to succeed so quickly was that non-Pushtuns (and even some Pushtuns) were eager to collaborate with the United States in order to get rid of the Taliban. This is consistent with other cases where a transnational revolutionary ideology failed to overcome narrow ethnic or national differences.
- The oldest Islamic revolutionary regime—Iran—has been undergoing a chronic crisis of legitimacy. Anti-American rhetoric cannot hide the regime's own failings. Young, educated Iranians have become increasingly cynical about the wisdom of the regime's self-appointed leadership. They want the country to be run by elected leaders instead. Whatever the appeal Islamic fundamentalism may have in countries where it has not yet come to power, Iran's experience suggests that popular support for it declines the longer it has been in power.
- Some Muslims reportedly welcomed the 9/11 attacks as "blows against imperialism" which enhanced the legitimacy and prestige of those who launched them. But as Al Qaeda and its associates have increasingly launched attacks on fellow Muslims, they raise doubts and fears about their ultimate intentions. A Muslim world free of Western influence may appeal to the emotions of many. But what would such a world be like for Muslims themselves? This question becomes more urgent as it becomes increasingly clear that

Al Qaeda is not simply opposed to the West, but to Muslims whom it deems insufficiently religious. As Muslims come to fear what the implications for their own lives might be like afterward, optimistic assumptions about the benevolent nature of Islamic fundamentalist revolution will erode.

What can America and the West do to increase the prospect that Islamic fundamentalism will become discredited within the Muslim world? One thing should be clear: military means alone will not accomplish this task. This does not mean that military means can be avoided, especially in response to an attack. But as was seen after 9/11, the successful American overthrow of the Taliban served not to discredit that regime but to legitimate it in the eyes of many Muslims. Thus, other than military means, will be needed if Islamic fundamentalism is to be discredited within the Muslim world.

What might America and the West do to encourage this process? It was mentioned earlier that transnational revolutionary ideologies link many localized concerns together into an overarching narrative that points to a common cause for their grievances, identifies common allies, and proposes a common solution. To the extent that specific Muslim v. non-Muslim conflicts can be resolved, the incentive to join a transnational revolutionary movement will be reduced for those whom these conflicts are most salient. For example, if the Arab/Israeli, Kashmiri, or Chechen conflicts could be resolved peacefully, Palestinians, Pakistanis, and/or Chechens would presumably have far less incentive to join forces with Islamic fundamentalists in conflicts that are still being fought elsewhere.

There are those who are attracted to Islamic fundamentalist revolution because they see it as the only means available for overthrowing American-backed authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world. American and Western support for democratization in the Muslim world might serve to undercut the desire for revolutionary change. And as Islamic fundamentalists partici-

pate in elections and government, many (if not all) of them might become more moderate.

Resolving intractable Muslim v. non-Muslim conflicts and democratizing pro-Western regimes, of course, will be extraordinarily difficult. Failing to accomplish these tasks, however, may only serve to increase the likelihood that Islamic fundamentalist revolution will occur in more countries. Like Marxist-Leninist regimes during the Cold War, these regimes may well become discredited internally over time, and enthusiasm for Islamic fundamentalism is likely to die out among those who have direct experience of life under it. There are important signs that this process has reached an advanced stage in Iran. But it is a time-consuming process that is highly costly in terms of human lives. Muslim nations—as well as the rest of the world—would be better off if they could avoid this process through a combination of conflict resolution and democratization. Some Muslim nations, though, will undoubtedly go through it. And both for them and for us, things will get worse before they get better.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

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