

Preface

This book is a work of synthesis that aspires to fill a major gap in the literature on political Islam—namely, the need for an introductory text that is readily intelligible to the nonspecialist reader while simultaneously highlighting the complexity of the subject and avoiding oversimplification. The book is written both for students and for general readers interested in the subject. The idea of the book emerged from my own experience over the past several years of teaching an upper-division undergraduate course on political Islam to students majoring in political science, international relations, history, and sociology. It became apparent to me that an overarching text written within a comparative framework was necessary to introduce undergraduates to the subject before they proceeded to study more detailed material specific to particular themes, regions, or countries.

There is no dearth of high-quality specialist literature on various aspects of the interaction of religion and politics in Islam. However, much of it is very dense, highly specialized, country specific, and not easily ingested by students without adequate background in the study of Islam and/or of the Muslim world. Above all, there is no single text that analyzes comparatively the various forms of political activity undertaken in the name of Islam and presents them in a way that would make the multifaceted phenomenon intelligible to students and general readers alike. The book that I have written will, I believe, be able to perform this task. It aims not only at providing students and lay readers a comprehensive and comprehensible introduction to the subject of political Islam but also at directing them to further readings to which they can turn for additional and detailed information on individual themes and case studies. I believe that the greatest value of the book lies in its capacity to perform this dual function.

I reckon that the very same qualities of this book that are likely to appeal to students will attract the general reader genuinely interested in understanding the relationship between religion and politics in the Muslim world. The book will therefore help to dispel many of the misconceptions and stereotypes about political Islam—and, indeed, about Islam itself—among the general public, while still encouraging its readers to maintain a critical and analytical approach toward the subject. This, I believe, is an essential task given the distortions, whether deliberate or unwitting, apparent in a great deal of the writing on the political manifestations of Islam.

“Political Islam” has become a growth industry in the West in general and the United States in particular following 9/11. This has led to the emergence of a large number of half-baked “experts”—especially among the media and, with a few honorable exceptions, in the policy think tanks—who speak and write about the subject with a degree of confidence and authority that is usually related inversely to the amount of knowledge they possess about it. The situation in academia is, thankfully, much better. However, much of the scholarly literature on the subject is written by academics for each other, is highly specialized, and is not widely read either by the lay public or by students other than those who aspire to become specialists themselves.

This book attempts to bridge the gaps both between gown and town and between academic specialists and the large number of students in the social sciences and humanities interested in gaining an understanding of political Islam but not intending to become specialists in the subject. The large majority of undergraduates in political science, international relations, history, and related disciplines in the English-speaking and English-reading countries do not have adequate background of Islam and political Islam before taking a course on the subject. This book hopes to introduce these students and the general reader to the phenomenon of political Islam lucidly, without jargon, and without taking recourse—as far as possible—to non-English terms. At the same time, this book aims at alerting its readers to the complexities of the subject and its contextually rooted character. It does so by demonstrating, above all, that there are many faces of political Islam and that much of the political activity undertaken in the name of Islam is determined by discrete national contexts. The book therefore attempts to demolish the monolithic image of political Islam that has become standard fare in the West in much popular writing (the genre most read and most influential) regarding this subject.

Some of the major themes of the book were presented in seminars and/or lectures at a number of institutions, including the Center for Strategic and

International Studies (CSIS) and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, both in Washington, D.C.; the Council on Foreign Relations and the International Peace Academy in New York; the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, University College, the London School of Economics, and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, all in London; the Department of International Relations at Bilkent University, Ankara; the Foundation for Sciences and Arts (Bilim ve Sanat Vakfı) in Istanbul; the American University of Kuwait; the School of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; the Centre for Security Analysis in Chennai; and the Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. The feedback I received to many of these presentations helped me to refine my arguments and sharpen my conclusions.

I am very grateful to Mustapha Tlili, founder and director of *Dialogues: Islamic World—U.S.—The West*, a program currently based at New York University and earlier at the New School University in New York, for inviting me to coauthor the background paper “Who Speaks for Islam?” for the project “Who Speaks for Islam? Who Speaks for the West?” and present it at a workshop hosted by Prince Hassan bin Talal in Amman. Chapter 2 of this book, “Islam’s Multiple Voices,” was inspired by the work I did on the background paper for the project, and Mustapha deserves much of the credit for focusing my attention on this very important topic. I am also grateful to Shireen Hunter, formerly director of the Islam Program of the CSIS and currently director of the Carnegie Project on Reformist Islam at the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University, for inviting me to participate in a CSIS project called “Barriers to Modernization and Democratization in the Muslim World.” The paper that I presented on the interplay of internal and external factors obstructing the democratization of Muslim countries in the Middle East as part of that project helped to clarify much of my thinking on the prospects for democratization in the Muslim world. Several of the ideas first presented in that paper are reflected in parts of this book in more mature fashion.

This book would not have been completed but for a generous Capacity Building Grant from the MSU Foundation through the Office of the Provost of Michigan State University. The grant helped me get release time from teaching and funded research travel undertaken in connection with this project. Dean Sherman Garnett and Associate Dean Norman Graham of James Madison College, the school of public affairs at Michigan State University, supported my endeavors and facilitated the completion of the book in multiple ways, for

which I owe them a huge debt of gratitude. Hasan Kosebalaban, Gamze Cavdar, and Matthew Zierler, three of the brightest and most promising young scholars of international relations I have come across in recent years, helped me in several ways in bringing the project to fruition, for which I am deeply grateful. In particular, Hasan spent long hours on the final draft of the manuscript, making substantive comments, checking and formatting endnotes, and making sure that the manuscript conformed to the publishers' specifications. I cannot thank him enough for his assistance, always rendered with a smile and a request for more "work." Jim Reische, my editor at the University of Michigan Press, was an invaluable source of sage advice that helped to keep me on the "straight and narrow" and prevented me from going off on too many tangents.

This book has profited immensely from the fact that, thanks to the vision of current president and former provost Lou Anna Kimsey Simon, Michigan State University has in the past three years assembled a critical mass of faculty interested in diverse aspects and regions of the Muslim world. The presence on campus of my Muslim studies colleagues—young, energetic, highly intelligent, and exceptionally committed to the study of the Muslim world—provided me with an environment very conducive to thinking about and discussing various facets of political Islam. Their input, while often indirect, has been very valuable to my work. MSU has further demonstrated its commitment to the study of the Muslim world by simultaneously establishing a Muslim Studies Program and a Muslim Studies Undergraduate Specialization. Both these ventures have dramatically helped increase MSU students' and faculty's exposure to and understanding of the Muslim world. I am particularly proud of having been chosen to lead these efforts at Michigan State University at this critical juncture.

My wife, Salma, was, as usual, a source of great strength during the period I was working on this book. She has had a long-standing interest in the interaction between religion and politics in countries of the Middle East and South Asia. Her incisive comments about various aspects of this complex subject, based on her readings and her observations as we traveled together several times in the Middle East during the past few years, often helped me sort out in my mind issues that would otherwise have remained unresolved. The book is dedicated to her in gratitude for her support and in recognition of the fact that she is the only person whose ideas I have felt free over the years to appropriate without acknowledgment or attribution.