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 Vakfý) 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.

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current president and former provost Lou Anna Kimsey Simon, Michigan
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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 valu-
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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
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