

# Islam as a Theory of International Relations?

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JOHN TURNER, AUG 3 2009

In 1966 J. Harris Proctor argued in his book *Islam and International Relations* [i] that the idea that there is a connection between Islam and the conduct of I.R. is distinctly invalid. The notion that Islam could be influential upon international affairs and should be an independent subject of study he claimed would be a difficult argument to make.[ii] Proctor however was attempting to examine Islam's influence on individual sovereign state behaviour, and considering the Iranian Revolution of 1979 had yet to occur his point could have been perceived to be plausible in the International Relations study of the day. Working within the traditional confines of I.R theory possibly it is difficult to observe Islam in isolation, as states in the Middle East have since their formation in the post-colonial era acted with few exceptions in their own self interest. However, observing Islam as a theory of I.R. in its own right, as *ara/ siyasi al Islami* (Islamic political order) not as a factor which influences I.R may well be a more intriguing quest.

There is a wealth of literature devoted to the study of Islam within International Relations, a subject which has grown exponentially in this decade. However, these resources view Islam as a factor to be understood in the context of existing I.R. paradigms not as an approach in and of itself. A possible explanation for this is that Islam is at once a non-Westphalian discourse and a theory that is grounded to neither positivists nor post-positivists inquiry. It does not seek in anyway to understand through an investigation of the observable or causal forces. The only sources for inquiry have already been revealed through the *Hadith* and *Quran*. Islam then, as many of its champions would proclaim, is a complete social, political, economic and foreign policy system. Unlike Christianity, which by its very nature allows states to separate the business of state-craft and the business of personal religion, (Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's)[iii] a concept of secular political sovereignty that became a universal tenant of Western political thinking and diplomacy through the Treaty of Augsburg (1555) and the Peace of Westphalia (1648). Islam however, many of its believers would claim, accounts for all areas of social interaction.

Islamic I.R. is a systemic theory, not of how states interact with each other or how the system affects the state, but it is rather a concept of world order that focuses on the relations between the Muslim/Arab and the non-Muslim/Arab sphere and how that realm should be ordered. Portraying Islam as working from the systemic level of analysis is in some ways intellectually uncomfortable as it speaks to abstract concepts such as the *Umma* (community of believers) and *assabiya* (group feeling) and relies upon a notion of extra rational agency. However these are the primary components that constitute Islamic concepts of world order and give it a unique perspective.

This piece will seek to meet two objectives. First as stated, to propose that Islam is in fact a theory of International Relations not simply a subject of study within orthodox International Relations. The second will be to identify theoretical traditions within the Islamic paradigm and demonstrate through a brief case study how the Egyptian New Islamists, the Muslim Brotherhood and Al Qaeda fit within it.

The present condition of the world is that of states which exist in an anarchical structure as well as a varying array of non-state actors. Muslim states behave much like non-Muslim states in the international system on the basis of self help and self interest. It is in many ways just another case of *realpolitik*. [iv] The concept however of Islamic society is universal which makes differences between Muslim states and governments less prominent than realists may suppose, [v] creating an Islamic state sub-system that functions within the broader international state system with independent concepts of order and what constitutes the boundaries of inside (*Dar al Islam*) [vi] and outside (*Dar al Harb*). [vii]

# Islam as a Theory of International Relations?

Written by John Turner

Islam has been ineffective in building a solid political bloc particularly since the disbanding of the Ottoman Empire in 1924.[viii] This is evidenced by the persistent inter and intra-state conflicts, most notably the Iran/Iraq war of the 1980's that lasted eight years and resulted in excess of one-million deaths.[ix] However despite this there is still an underlying concept of Islamic or Arab unity that emerges in the foreign relations of Arab/ Islamic states, something that can clearly be observed through the discourse of community, imagery and appeals to a shared historical experience. The crux of this would suggest that states in the Islamic world act in a manner that could be attributed to orthodox I.R. theories as a matter of pragmatism but also tend to think and conceptualize the world in a ways more amenable to Islamic political and as it shall be argue here Islamic I.R. theories. Non-state organizations specifically al Qaeda may work more within Islamic I.R. parameters not suffering a loss of freedom of action that naturally comes with a concrete physical territory and as a recognized participant in the international system.

There is at once sovereign states and independent non-state actors who operate around this principle of an all encompassing concept of *assabiya* (community feeling)[x], be it Islamic or Arab. Quite often and at varying intervals these actors seek to be the dominant force in efforts to bring the community together under its hegemony. Hence politics in the Muslim world are often driven by this concept that has resulted in centuries of power struggles between competing entities be they the imperial Caliphs, Arab nationalists such as Nasser, Quadafi or Hussein, fundamentalists such as the Muslim Brotherhood or ideological revolutionaries like Khomeini or Zawahiri/Bin Laden.

What then is the utility of arguing for Islamic I.R. theories? Understanding the actions of international terror organizations as directed towards the West has been an intense academic subject for some time, and consensus on what it is, what its aims are or why they even exist has not been reached. Explanations from "Clashes of Civilizations"[xi], U.S. foreign policy, Western norms and whole range of other suggestions still come up lacking. What is needed is to understand the Islamic world on its own not on Western terms. This kind of Westphalian secular reading of I.R. in the Islamic world on its own is impoverished. We need an Islamic theory of I.R. along side orthodox concepts to truly grapple effectively with these kinds of questions.

This piece will seek to demonstrate the uniqueness of Islamic concepts of the international by looking at the ontological foundations that are universal in Islamic theories. This is what makes Islamic I.R. distinct and in need of special inquiry. Second, it will look to locate the varying schools within the Islamic tradition and demonstrate how they are in many ways similar to orthodox concepts but still remaining true to there ontological position that again makes this area of study unique. Finally it will construct a brief case study of how Islamic theory has emerged in the forms of its three major classifications traditionalist, non-traditionalist and the Salafi/ Jihadi School in actors of the contemporary age; The Muslim Brotherhood .the Egyptian new-Islamists and al Qaeda.[xii] In doing so, it will help to conceptualize abstract concepts in the corpus of more tangible entities. Islamic political theorizing often moves past simply acting as a school of thought and emerges as distinct active organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood or al Qaeda or in state forms such as revolutionary Iran or the Taliban's Afghanistan.

## Traditional, Non-traditional and Salafi/Jihadi Approaches

Where the various schools of Islamic I.R. share an agreed ontology and indeed share a moment of political origin in the drafting of the Constitution of Medina,[xiii] they differ along issues of epistemology. Interestingly however with reverence to the ontological unity and universal Islamic rejections of positivist or post-positivist inquiry Islamic theories in many ways resemble their orthodox ideological cousins, realism and liberalism.

Islamic thought regarding the international has been forged in reaction to particular historical periods that Farhang Rajaei terms "phases" or "debates." [xiv] Islamic political thought and by extension international theorizing is not a fluid developmental process. Orthodox International Relations theory has produced a series of debates where the ontological and epistemological foundations held by one camp are brought through inter-theoretical dialogue into serious question, forcing a conscious

re-examination of an approach to reassert or create an entirely new position. Islamic debates however have produced consistent re-hashing of the ideas of the two opposing traditional and reformists points of view with the third position developing from elements of the traditionalists and early reformists. This has resulted in the building of

# Islam as a Theory of International Relations?

Written by John Turner

theories that although new remain close to their original form. This is a phenomenon due primarily to a universally shared ontology of Islamic political thought.

Three distinct theoretical approaches to international politics appear to emerge when investigating Islamic thought. A traditionalist school,[xv] which is in many ways mirrors classical realist concepts regarding power, anarchy, war and the state of nature. A reformist, or non-traditional school,[xvi] that regards far less rigid concepts of cooperation and security, engages with modernity, accepts the temporal existence of nation states in Islamic lands and provides a discourse for a durable peace with non-Muslims. Finally a revolutionary school termed Salafi/ Jihadist which serves as the ideological backbone for international terror organizations.

Three key concepts are present in all Islamic international theory and warrant discussion. First is the concept of the state and sovereignty. In the Islamic concept the state does not appear as a system of sovereigns but rather one indivisible Muslim *Umma* (community of believers) bound by *assabiya* (group feeling). Second, the Islamic theoretical world view contains a conception of inside/outside. Inside is the domain of Islam (*Dar Al Islam*) outside is the realm of the other (*Dar Al Harb*). Lastly all Islamic approaches have a shared ontology. The starting point for knowledge is the *Quran* and *Hadith*.

Where the different theories may disagree as to where the boundaries of the inside and outside are and how they are to be engaged and whether they are in perpetual conflict, all agree that there is a concept of the Islamic and non-Islamic space that defines the boundary between what is the domestic and where the international begins.[xvii] The defining difference between the approaches to Islamic theory lies in their opposing epistemologies. The *Quran* and the *Hadith* are the only resources from which any foundational knowledge can be obtained. Here again the approaches differ on method of interpretation but all agree that the ontological foundation of an Islamic I.R. theory will be derived from this.[xviii]

These three concepts are defining components of Islamic International Relations theories. Though they are in some ways similar to present I.R. theory they cannot be comfortably pigeon holed into existing spaces as their ontological foundations are based on particular medieval texts, allow for neither a positivist or post-positivist inquiry and these concepts of sovereignty are alien to the Westphalian model. As this is the case, Islam must be regarded not just as a subject to be studied within existing I.R. theory but as a paradigm of international theory in its own right.

## The Traditionalist Approach

The three theoretical concepts prevalent in all Islamic I.R. thought, the non-Westphalian approach to sovereignty, the inside/outside approach of the *Dar al Harb* and *Dar al Islam* in defining the domestic and international and the reliance on particular texts as methodology have previously been noted. However despite these basic concepts seeming to be in stark opposition to accepted I.R. theory traditionalism still bears a striking resemblance to classical Hobbesian realism.

Classical realism perceives a world defined by insecurity. A condition of anarchy that results in a persistent existential struggle which can only bring temporal security by the state as the key unit of sovereignty and constantly seeking to maximize one's power over the other. Cooperation of the Lockean variety is not possible as other actors can in no way be trusted as is demonstrated in the "prisoner's dilemma" and the "hare analogy." Traditionalists arrive at rather similar conclusions. For them however the driving factor is not a simple animalistic existential struggle for survival in a harsh insecure world but also a messianic mission to spread the doctrine of the ideology. There is a strong element of the Hegelian notion of history as an end which can be achieved in the traditionalists thinking. The utopia will emerge when the world has submitted to the Faith. This kind of messianic universalism leaves little room for compromise and challenges Western concepts of sovereignty and security.

Traditionalist theories of International Relations were formed during what Ragaei terms the first debate and would come to influence modern traditionalist theories emerging in the second debate during the later half of the 20th century.[xix] The first debate emerged during formative years and during the period of Islamic conquests where Muslims perceived themselves as threatened by at first the powers of Persia and Rome and later Byzantium and

## Islam as a Theory of International Relations?

Written by John Turner

Ethiopia. This time of almost persistent conflict with neighbouring states gave a particular Hobbesian essence to the thinking of Islamic scholars.

The traditionalist school is defined by the concept of *Jihad*.<sup>[xx]</sup> The world is essentially divided into two realms, *Dar al Harb* (The realm of War) and the *Dar al Islam* (The realm of Islam).<sup>[xxi]</sup> Here a very distinct concept of foreign relations as defined by the constant struggle for survival is evident. The *Dar al Islam* is those areas under Islamic control where the rights of Muslims are observed and ruled by a true Muslim. The world beyond this domain is the *Dar al Harb*.<sup>[xxii]</sup> This is the space under the hegemony of the infidels. This domain is not just considered dangerous and threatening as a classical realist theorist may conceptualize anarchy but it is considered a space which can be justifiably conquered in the name of spreading the religion under the appropriate conditions.<sup>[xxiii]</sup> For a considerable period this concept of the inside and outside defined Islamic foreign relations.<sup>[xxiv]</sup>

Traditional thinking contains rather strict epistemological foundations based on literalist textual inquiry. The *Hadith* and *Quran* as with all Islamic political thought are the starting point of inquiry. The traditionalists perceive the *Quran* as the word of God as spoken to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel and the *Hadith* as the words and deeds of the Prophet. They are therefore in no need of amendment. Time is irrelevant and interpretation of these texts to adapt to conditions of modernity are perceived as heretical. As Islam is a complete economic, social, political, and as is argued here, International theory, then so to are the *Quran* and *Hadith* perfect guides to the proper understanding of all realms of social life without human interference in what has been divinely given. They are claimed to be without issues of translation as they are still read in the classical Arabic they were originally scribed. Traditionalist interpretations of texts to make rulings can be done from a number of positions be they grammatical, historical, philosophical or legal which imposes certain preconceived principles upon interpretation.<sup>[xxv]</sup>

Islamic I.R. is a non Western discourse and thereby contains a concept of sovereignty not necessarily amenable to Orthodox I.R. theory and Western concepts of the nation state. This is not to say however that there is no concept of sovereignty or 'state' in Islamic thinking. The *Umma* or the community of believers however is indivisible bound by the all encompassing *assabiya*. Muslims must not be ruled by non Muslims, nor there be more than one sovereign. Sovereignty is God's which manifests in its earthly form in one who is divinely chosen.

The concept of the *Umma* of course did not eliminate tribal authority, but overruled it with the belief in God and sovereignty on earth in the form of a new Leviathan, Muhammad and the Caliphs that followed as the *amir al muminin* (Commander of the Faithful).<sup>[xxvi]</sup> Order began with the Caliphate and diffuses into smaller parochial units. The state may be a focal point of concern in the contemporary but it has never attained the absolute claims of the Western Westphalian style state.<sup>[xxvii]</sup>

In European concepts of sovereignty the nation state requires identification of people as a national cultural group in a defined territory. Islam emphasises a dynastic concept of what power is.<sup>[xxviii]</sup> Again this does not dissolve local power as was clear during the Umayyad, Abbasid and Ottoman Caliphates and appears in the Constitution of Medina. This allows for a somewhat more fluid, hierarchical and ambiguous concept of sovereignty than is possible in a Westphalian order of equally sovereign states. Again to refer to Hobbes a defining principle of sovereignty is summed up as, the powerful must be obeyed (*manishtaddat watatuhu wajabat ta atuhu*)<sup>[xxix]</sup> Claims of world order and the image of the Caliphate have yet to be removed from the inter-subjectivity of Islam. The state though the focus of power is in fact an intermediary between the telos of Islamic peoples and a unified Islamic community.<sup>[xxx]</sup>

Traditionalist have been criticised for being static in their concepts of foreign affairs. They remain however very influential in modern Islamic thought.<sup>[xxxi]</sup> Though traditionalist views are laden quite often with Medieval concepts of imperial world order and rely exclusively on seventh century texts, it is non the less a basis for the thought of many modern Islamic political movements and profoundly influential among the Islamic revivalists who view the nation state system as a Western creation imposed upon the Muslim world and engagement with modernity as compromising the faith and thereby surrendering Islamic sovereignty to foreign powers. This makes the cornerstone of the traditional Islamic international theory the concept of *jihad* as a tool for survival in a Hobbesian world of aggressive forces that present a persistent existential threat to the *Umma*.

# Islam as a Theory of International Relations?

Written by John Turner

## The Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood founded in 1928 by Hassan al Banna in Egypt represents a traditionalist interpretation of Islamic political and international thought. Sayid Qutb an influential member of the Brotherhood demonstrates the organizations traditionalist realist attitude by calling for the restoration of *Sharia* law through “physical power and *jihad*.”[xxxii] According to al-Banna the group’s stance can be defined as “Allah is our objective, the *Quran* is our constitution, the Prophet is our leader, *jihad* is our way.”[xxxiii]

For the Brotherhood the *Quran* and *Hadith* in themselves constitute a complete and perfect social political organization, divinely inspired and in no need of further amendment. Islamic governments must be based on these strict assumptions in order to attain the legitimacy to rule.[xxxiv] Despite a strict traditionalist understanding of Islamic thought the Brotherhood has been actively engaged in matters of politics and though officially rejecting violence many critics note that this is more a tactical political manoeuvre than fact, this being just a part of their objective to secure a complete Islamicization of society.[xxxv]

The concept of the international for the Muslim Brotherhood centers on traditionalist concepts regarding the *Umma* as a physical concrete territory, rather than an abstract idea. The unification of this territorial space under Islamic rule in the form of the Caliphate is their deterministic objective. The sovereignty of the current system of nation states is invalid despite the attempts of the Brotherhood to at times work within it, something that has not gone unnoticed by the militant more extreme traditionalist theorist Ayman al Zawahiri.

The Muslim Brotherhood is representative of one branch of traditionalist thought, al-Qaeda is representative of quite another. Where the Brotherhood is concerned primarily with matters within Islamic societies, al Qaeda represents a more violent global aspect of the traditionalist school.

## The Non-Traditionalists Approach

Non traditionalist theories of Islamic I.R. are a relatively new addition to Islamic political thought being products of the second and third debates beginning in the late 19th and late 20th centuries respectively. Traditionalism during this period manifested as Islamism and Islamic revivalism but a new trend with more accommodating liberal concepts, particularly in response to modernity. Non-traditionalists are influenced by thinkers such as Jamal a din al Afghani who in the second debate asserted a mediated position between the zealot wing of the rejectionist position that sought to shun modernity and the West in absolute and the modernists that sought to fully incorporate Western ideals. Non-traditionalist thinking continues to evolve in what has been referred to as the third debate, a reaction to the rise of modern traditionalism inspired by Sayid Qutb and Ayatollah Khomeini. Like its intellectual forbearer modern non-traditionalists seek to find some way to make sense of the modern world, embrace though cautiously modernity without being subjected to a de-Islamization.

Traditional and non-traditional Islamic I.R. can be perceived as concepts of world order, the former taking a Hobbesian account of the state of nature and the later conceiving of a Lochean order that though still conscious of anarchy embarks on a path of potential cooperation allowing for a peaceful coexistence of the Islamic and non Islamic spheres. The Islamic word as the non-traditionalists understand it is no longer capable of supporting both universalism and trans-nationalism.[xxxvi] This means there must be an acute revision of the traditionalist concepts of *Dar al Harb* and *Dar al Islam* as the non-traditionalists envision the possibility of alternate inter-subjective worlds coexisting without one asserting its hegemony upon the other through a superior *assabiya*.[xxxvii]

The traditionalist concept of the divided world is largely a product of the *Hannah fiqh*, which non-traditionalists would argue is in fact *ijtihad*. This would be contradictory to the traditionalist dismissal of Quranic interpretation. Traditionalist argue that this concept is applicable only to the particular time and place of its origin, that this was a temporal condition resulting from an emergency situation in which Islamic world was in a persistence existential struggle with its neighbours. Non-traditionalist argue that this concept is invalid to the contemporary and insist that it is not an absolute division of the world. They argue for a third way, the concept that of the *Dar al Ahd* (realm of treaties). This is a principle regarding the possibility of peace with the non Muslim world.[xxxviii]

# Islam as a Theory of International Relations?

Written by John Turner

Non traditionalists are more accommodating in their acceptance of the nation state. The *Umma* is less a physical and more a meta-physical concept. Civilizations do not control states rather states control civilizations. They claim however this does not mean the surrendering of Muslim principles. They believe it is not a betrayal to the faith to be both modern and Muslim. What emerges is a double faceted concept of sovereignty. They concede they must accept the *raison de tate* but also insist the state adhere to Islamic principles and hold to an eternal consciousness of *assabiya*. This condition of the nation state may be for them temporal but does not require a scuttling of the system by means of *jihad* but rather the willingness of peoples to work within the system to reach desired ends. [xxxix]

Non-traditionalists differ most distinctly from traditionalists in their epistemological approach. Where both agree that the *Quran* and *Hadith* are the basis for all societal structure, and regard these as divinely inspired texts they differ on issues regarding interpretation. Traditionalists argue that as this is given directly by God through the prophet they are in fact complete and regard no need for human interference regarding interpretation.

*Ijtihad* is the concept of religious endeavour. This is the employment of personal judgement based on the holy texts.[xl] This represents the cornerstone of non-traditionalist epistemology. Traditionalist violently, often quite literally reject this but the non-traditionalist assert it is necessary to contend with the conditions of the modern world, allowing them to incorporate non- Islamic thought as was quite often the case during the periods of conquest in particular during the Abbasid Caliphate when ideas emerging from the Hellenic world were quite often brought into practice. Where traditionalists review verses from a particular stance (legal, grammatical, historical or philosophical) to make a judgement, non-traditionalists review all the verses on a particular subject from no particular stance and attempt to apply these verses to the issue at hand.[xli]

Non-traditionalists make these arguments not for the purpose of marginalizing Islam but rather with an understanding that modernity is necessary and yet the Islamic world is not suited for Western style modernity in absolution. What they suggest is needed is an Islamicized modernity that is capable of taking from the West without allowing the Islamic world to mirror the West and weakening Islamic identity. [xlii]

## The New-Islamists

The new-Islamists emerged in Egypt in the late 1970's seeking to establish themselves as a school of thought as opposed to a political party, thereby entering into the public arena in a way that would not invite repression in the manner in which the Muslim Brotherhood had. They are representative of contemporary non-traditionalists thought. Among the most noted of the new-Islamists are Yusuf al Qaradawi, Tariq al Bishri and Fahmi Huwaydi. Influenced in particular by the work of Jamal al din al Afghani (1838-1897) and Muhommed Abduh (1849-1905) their approach to international politics is centred on the concept of *wasatiya* (middle way). [xliii]

Afghani writing at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century sought a way to mediate between those who desired the absolute rejection of all things Western and those who would adopt Western values at the expense of all that is Islamic. Abduh aimed to bring about reform in the Muslim world through interpretation of texts by means of reason and restore the role of Islamic civilization through a message of universal peace.[xliv]

The new-Islamist "middle way" approach argues for the establishment of a new *fiqh* (jurisprudence) that can welcome change as well as preserve the traditional culture.[xlv] It is in essence a way of reconciling Islam with modernity and staving of any "clash of civilizations" by offering a concept not of competing universalisms but rather coexisting ones.[xlvi] It is the concept of an *ijtihad* applicable and amenable to the global age.[xlvii] The new Islamists should not be confused as being pro-Western. They advocate the defence of their peoples in the face of what they perceive as neo-imperialist aspirations of the West particularly the Unites States, and argue for the right of Muslim peoples to shape their future within the higher purpose of Islam.[xlviii]

The new-Islamists contribution to Islamic I.R. is a rejection of the traditionalist Hobbesian approach to the *Dar al Harb* and *Dar al Islam*. The notion that these must be set in violent opposition does not for the new-Islamists necessarily hold true in the contemporary age. The possibility and indeed necessity for cooperation between the Muslim and non-Muslim world must be possible if order is to be achieved and maintained.[xlix]

# Islam as a Theory of International Relations?

Written by John Turner

## The Fourth Debate and the Emergence Salafi/Jihadi School

Just as orthodox International Relations theory has emerged through challenges presented through debates that resulted in reconstructed or entirely new theories as new ontological and epistemological challenges emerge that are often dependent upon the changing nature of world politics, so has Islamic International Relations theory evolved in respect to the changing nature of our international political world.

The evolution of orthodox International Relations was subject to international political determinants beginning with the First World War and continuing through The Second World War, The Cold War and finally the contemporary period characterised by U.S. Hegemony, Globalization and post 9/11 international politics.

Though spanning a significantly broader time period Islamic International Relations theory has developed in a somewhat similar manner. As was discussed in previous sections, the first Islamic debate was a product of Islam's formative years characterised by persistent conflict first defensive in nature and later offensive. As the new religion struggled to survive and then propagate the faith through force a particular attitude was entrenched in the minds of Islamic scholars. The faith was intimately connected with war and survival. Much like the Hobbesian state of nature, which perceived an insecure world laden with violence and an eternal existential struggle which defines the human experience, so to do the thinkers who influenced the traditionalist school of Islamic International Relations.

The second debate began towards the end of the 19th century as the Islamic world became increasingly encroached upon by European power, culture and ideas. Thinkers challenging the long sustained traditionalist approach by asserting that the Islamic world was no longer capable of supporting trans-nationalism and universalism. They began to advocate a position that mediated between the modernists who sought to fully engage with Western civilization and the traditionalists who would take a rejectionist stance in an attempt to preserve the purity of the Islamic world.

The experience of colonialism and the increasing influence of Western thought and culture however spurred a traditionalist backlash evident in the work of Sayid Qutb, Hassan al Banna, Maulana Maududi and others, that manifested in the form of revolutionary organizations most notably the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1920's.

As was previously noted concepts of the international that Islamic theorists project are products of the world in which they live. The first traditionalist theories were forged in Islam's Hobbesian origins, the second debate and the rise of non-traditional thinking the product of encounters with Europe, the third a traditionalist backlash resulting from a feeling of disenchantment and marginalization caused by European colonialism and the post colonial disorder. How then is the contemporary period of the early 21st century to be conceptualized?

The contemporary period could best be described as ushering in a fourth debate that may speak to a struggle for the Muslim world to define itself. While not discounting non-traditionalist theoretical models and their continued influence upon Islamic International Relations thought (though little has been written in Western scholarship in regard to this strand) the present debate unlike previous debates is not a backlash from the opposition side of the traditionalist non traditionalist paradigm. Nor does it appear to be the result of some great global change. Rather it appears to be a perceived influence on bringing about a global change. This emerging Salafi/ Jihadi School appears to be a new wing of the traditionalist school that has been constructed less in the heat of scholastic intellectual debate but rather unfolds and develops in the heat of global affairs and conflict. September 11, 2001 was the moment in which the adherents to this radical brand of non-traditionalism made themselves known to those who had ignored them since the late 1970's. Al Qaeda demonstrated that the International Relations philosophy it would follow and as well develop was far more radical than even the radicals of the traditionalist school such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

Many among the Afghan Arabs<sup>[1]</sup> believed they had been the catalyst to the eventual collapse of the USSR. According to the Mujahedeen myth, it had been they acting unilaterally that had ushered in the collapse of the mighty Soviet empire.<sup>[1]</sup>

"It is only because the Americans were occupying the region that they threatened to use military force should the Soviets conduct such an intervention. So the Americans would be lying if they claim they had supported us. We

## Islam as a Theory of International Relations?

Written by John Turner

challenge them to provide evidence supporting such claims. They were a burden on us and on the mujahedeen in Afghanistan, for we were performing our obligations in protecting Islam in Afghanistan even though this obligation of ours was at times serving, though without our consent, interests of America. When the interests of two sides coincide at times, this does not amount to co-operation. We regard them with animosity and there are statements going far back with us calling for a boycott of American products, and even the necessity to attack American forces and America's economy. This goes back for over 12 years now." **Usama bin Laden** [lii]

The United States they believed to be far weaker willed than the Soviet invaders and would have little stomach for a long bloody war in foreign lands. It followed logically from this point for the Jihadist ideologues such as Usama Bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri, that the United States which they regarded to be far less fearsome warriors than their Soviet adversaries could be easily intimidated. Rather than fighting the near enemy of the regimes in the Middle East it would be preferable to intimidate their Western benefactors into retreating as they had done in Somalia in 1993 and in Beirut prior in 1983, leaving Arab governments in a position of vulnerability. [liii]

"We believe that America is weaker than Russia and from what we have heard from our brothers who waged jihad in Somalia, they found to their greatest surprise the weakness, frailness and cowardliness of the American soldier. When only eight of them were killed they packed up in the darkness of night and escaped without looking back." **Usama bin Laden** [liv]

Al Qaeda is far more than just an international terror organization. It is an ideology that has emerged from the thinkers like those of the Muslim Brotherhood, influenced by both the traditionalist and non-traditionalist side of Islamic International Relations.

Al Qaeda's ideology contains elements of both Salafi and Jihadi thought. It embodies certain key concepts that differ from the broader range of traditionalist scholarship such as that embraced by the Muslim Brotherhood.

The term Salafism derives from the Arabic work *Salaf* meaning righteous predecessors. It like many Islamic revivalist concepts speaks of an idealized Islamic world and seeks to model the contemporary world by looking to the time of the Prophet and seeking out an authentic Islam.[lv] Salafis contend that Islam was perfect in its origins, however it has been corrupted over the centuries by foreign influences. It therefore seeks to rediscover the original Islam through the holy texts.[lvi] Discourse amongst Islamic scholars to develop Islamic theology is at the core of the corruption of the faith that was in its origins a perfect complete social, political, economic and foreign affairs doctrine.

When the reality contradicts with Islam, it is not allowed to interpret Islam so as to agree with reality, because this would be a distortion of Islam; instead the duty requires changing the reality so as to conform to Islam.**Hizb al-Tahrir** [lvii]

It has been argued that the two major strands within Islamic International Relations paradigm of traditionalism and non-traditionalism can be related to orthodox International Relations theory, realism and liberalism respectively. The

Salafi/ Jihadi School however is something quite different all together. It is a kind of utopian thought infused with an Islamic hyper-realism and universalism that is in stark opposition to the neo-liberal Western order. At its core are the tenants of traditionalism with millennial notions of jihad linked to the *Dar al Harb/ Dar al Islam* concept of the international and domestic, critical of cooperation and strict methodological use of the *Quran* and *Hadith*. Salafi/ Jihadists however are clearly distinct from the traditionalists. They assert drawing from the arguments of Sayid Qutb that in fact true Islam does not exist. As there are no perfect Sharia governed states, there are no true Muslims. God's sovereignty has been usurped. This is at the heart of the divide between traditionalists and the Salafi/ Jihadist.[lviii] The Salafi/ Jihadi School of Islamic International Relations warrants separate discussion from the traditionalist school. First in their clash of civilizations conceptualization of the *Dar al Harb/ Dar al Islam*, in methodological approaches of textual inquiry and concepts of domestic political practices.

The Salafi/ Jihadist however perceive the traditionalist as being flexible within these core assumptions. For the Salafi/ Jihadists sovereignty is absolute and universal. Conflict then is not just a matter of survival but the only tool for



# Islam as a Theory of International Relations?

Written by John Turner

achieving peace, as there can be no peace without a global Islamic political order (*al siyasi al Islami*) as brought about essentially through the re-establishment of a global Islamic state governed through monarchy in the form of a Caliph.[lix] Where this may not be evident in the immediate interests of jihadist organizations it is still the underlying philosophical tenant. Here the distinction between the near and far enemy as well as the near and far objective can be demonstrated. The near enemy being those governments representing the states which occupy the geographical space of the height of Islamic imperialism in the 14th century that Salafi/ Jihadist would view as un-Islamic.[lx] The far enemy is that of the realm of the *Dar al Harb* particularly Western states. The near objective then is the conquest or re-Islamization of this space and the far objective speaking to a futuristic global utopia in which Islam is unopposed.[lxi]

The Salafi/ Jihadi School's methodological practices regarding interpretations of holy texts are at the core of its epistemological assumptions. Drawing from the Salafi traditions they regard the *Quran* and *Hadith* as perfect in their original form. For the Salafi/ Jihadists the order created by the prophet in the 7th Century was perfect without need of amendment. It is their assertion that changes which have occurred are at the root of the decline of Islam after the 14<sup>th</sup> century.[lxii] Traditionalists and non-traditionalists debate appropriate methods for textual interpretation on emerging social and political issues. Where both traditionalists and Salafi/ Jihadists argue that the *Quran* and *Hadith* are the foundations of knowledge, Salafi/ Jihadists suggest that interpretation itself is heretical if the objective is to create the perfect Islamic society based upon the Muhammedan period.[lxiii]

Non-traditionalists have argued that *ijtihad* is necessary to bring Quranic thought into practice in the modern world. Traditionalists argue against this practice. However, interestingly the Salafi/ Jihadists may agree with the non-traditionalist assertion that traditionalist thinkers have engaged in *ijtihad* themselves. Non-traditionalists assert that the notion of the divided world was constructed during the *hannah fiqh* and is no longer applicable.[lxiv] This is a paradoxical moment for the Salafi/ Jihadists and demonstrates where the *Salafi* and *Jihadi* elements have been fused together. The Salafists advocating a return to the original position of Islam the Jihadists advocating a millennial agenda that the non-traditionalists have successfully argued is in fact *ijtihad* and therefore forbidden by the Salafist position.

Salafi/ Jihadists reject domestic political concepts as these are to the Salafist theorists Western concepts that have been imported into the Islamic world and ultimately led to its corruption and ensuing decline of Islamic power. It seeks to underscore Islamic universalism free from external influences.[lxv] This concept has been taken on by the al Qaeda ideologues.

The Muslim Brotherhood has been presented as an example of an organization working within the traditionalist camp. They are willing to work within the status quo system to bring about change. In this they are a political entity. They speak of social justice, economics and are thereby engage in a dialogue with the people and the existing powers to bring about the kind of change they advocate. For the Salafi/ Jihadi School these are Western activities that have no place in the Islamic political order and will in no way be successful in re-establishing the caliphate.[lxvi] Organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood are seen in essence to not be radical enough and to have compromised the traditional fundamentalist position. For the Salafi/ Jihadists there is no dialogue or compromise. Additionally there is no need to speak of social justice or economic concerns as these are matters that are unrelated to the primary duty of Muslims in a world not ruled by a true Muslims. Mans rule over man and the use of Western concepts of order are at the root of all evil.[lxvii]

The Salafi/ Jihadists are engaged in a zero sum game tied to perceptions of competing ontologies; Islam and Western liberalism. Perhaps what we have instead of a Clash of Civilizations is a clash of universalisms as perceived through the lens of Salafi/ Jihadi ideologues. Here is a clear departure from the discourse of the Islamic inter-paradigm debate engaged upon by the traditionalist and the non-traditionalists. The objective is absolute and non-negotiable even at the expense of the ideology or Islam itself. It is then quite basic in its assertions, a utopian vision set against a Hobbesian state of nature which allows for no compromise with those who would challenge its divine universalism even at a cost to its own survival and integrity.

## Al Qaeda

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Al Qaeda is the very embodiment of the Salafi/ Jihadi School of International Relations. Both Al Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood are influenced by the works of Sayid Qutb. However al Qaeda is the extreme application of Qutb's thinking. The theorists who serve as the ideological mentors to the organization have their beginnings within the Muslim Brotherhood, most notably Ayman al Zawahiri. These figures regard the Muslim Brotherhood as not sufficiently radicalized however to bring about the objectives of traditionalist Islamic thinking.

Al Qaeda is a by-product of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Arab fighters migrated to fight a holy war against the Soviet Union on behalf of Afghanistan and Islam and were given the now popularized identity as the Mujahideen. From their successes in repelling the Red Army they drew grandiose somewhat delusional conclusions regarding the abilities of a small group of lightly armed fighters to challenge powerful states and change the existing world order. It is here that the organization begins to take shape under the guidance of Abdullah Azzam<sup>[ixviii]</sup> and Usama bin Laden. Al Qaeda may be more an ideological umbrella however under which various like minded Jihadists congregate than an international terror organization with command and control following the Coalition invasion of Afghanistan to oust the Taliban. It is however an important focal point for the Salafi/ Jihadi School of International Relations.

Al Qaeda and its ideological masters are the keystone for Salafi/ Jihadi I.R. They served as the organization that would actualize this school of Islamic I.R. thinking into practice. They demonstrate the fearless nature of this kind of thought as well as their global agenda and ensuing belief that they can effect change in world politics. Where they have undoubtedly changed the course to some extent of the current political order they have failed to make significant progress towards their ultimate goal of establishing a new a new *umma* in the form of a modern caliphate. This however is unlikely to be the focal point of their legacy or their greatest contribution to the Salafi/ Jihadi School. Al Qaeda as the greatest practitioners of Salafi/ Jihadism to date have had a powerful influence in spreading this infectious ideology and will continue to influence how this brand of theoretical International Relations develops and is practiced in the years to come.

## Conclusion

The assertion of J. Harris Proctor in 1966 that Islam is irrelevant as a subject of inquiry within the study of International Relations has clearly been demonstrated to be a false proclamation in light of the events over the course of the last half century. Islam as a relevant political concept may be novel for the relatively young discipline of International Relations but it has long been influential as a catalyst of political thought within and more recently outside of the Islamic sphere. In fact Islam as it has been demonstrated here is even more than just a subject of study for scholars of International Relations; it is a theory in its own right. Westphalian discourses on the study of I.R. are only one type of tool of analysis and positivist and post positivist modes of inquiries don't necessarily represent finite epistemological boundaries. Where an ontological position believed to be divinely inspired may be out of place in the traditional understandings of orthodox political theory it does not render such an approach invalid. To truly grapple with many of the most perplexing questions regarding global terrorism theorists need an Islamic theory of International Relations along side Orthodox thinking if we are to move beyond our theoretical confines.

## Endnotes

[i] J. Harris Proctor, *Islam and I.R.* (N.Y: Praeger 1965)

[ii] Charles O. Cecil, *Review of Islam and I.R* ed. J. Harris Proctor in *The Journal of Modern African Studies* vol. 4 no. 2 (Oct 1966) pp. 272-274

[iii] *The King James Bible*, Mark 12-17

[iv] Mohammed Hariff Hassan, *War Peace or Neutrality: An overview of Islamic Polity's Basis of Inter-State Relations*, Rajarastan School of International Studies (2007) p.18

[v] Albert Hourani, in *Islam and Foreign Policy* ed. Adeed Dawsaha (Cambridge: U. Press 1983) p.178

# Islam as a Theory of International Relations?

Written by John Turner

[vi] Dar al Islam, the realm of Islam, that is the geographical space ruled by a Muslim in accordance with Islamic principles.

[vii] Dar al Harb, the realm of war, the geographical space not ruled by Muslims.

[viii] Ibid p.179

[ix] <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/iran-iraq.htm> accessed April 24, 2008

[x] *Assabiya* is the concept of community identity in the Middle East proposed by the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Tunisian sociologist Ibn Khaldun.

[xi] "Clash of Civilizations", thesis proposed by Samuel P. Huntington in 1993.

Samuel P. Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (N.Y: Simon and Schuster Press 1996)

[xii] Revolutionary Iran (1979) despite being the most dynamic contemporary Islamic political Middle Eastern movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not overlooked but was intentionally not included in this study. The actors chosen are of Sunni orientation. The rationale for this is that the Sunni/Shi'ite divide adds another rather complex dimension to this topic. Many Sunnis would deny the legitimacy of Iran to act as the leader of an Islamic revival for all Muslims. An adequate discussion of this would go beyond the capacity of this work which intends only to offer a broad general concept of the subject of Islamic I.R to be used as a conceptual tool in understanding global Islamic terror organizations.

[xiii] M.A.Muqtedar Khan, *The Compact of Medina: A Constitutional Theory of the Islamic State*, Mirror International (May 30, 2001)

[xiv] Farhang Rajaei, *Paradigm Shift in Muslim International Relations Discourse Studies* in Contemporary Islam vol.1 no.1 (1999)

[xv] Mohammed Abo-Kazleh, *Rethinking I.R. Theory in Islam: Towards a More Adequate Approach* in Turkish Journal of International Relations vol.5 no.4 (Winter 20006) p.41

[xvi] Ibid

[xvii] Abo-Kazleh 42-43, 45-46

[xviii] Rajaei p.2

[xix] Rajaei p.2

[xx] Abo-Kazmeh p.41

[xxi] Rajaei p.2

[xxii] Abo-Kazmeh p.42

[xxiii] ibid p.43

[xxiv] Rajaei p.2

[xxv] Mahmud Shalut, *The Koran and Fighting*, in Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam, Rudolph Peters and Markus

# Islam as a Theory of International Relations?

Written by John Turner

Weinner eds. (Princeton: 1999) p.61

[xxvi] P.J. Vatikiotis, *Islam and the State* (N.Y: Routledge 1987) p.36

[xxvii] Robert Cox, *Towards a Post-hegemonic Conceptualization of World Order: Reflections of the Relevancy of Ibn Khaldun* in *Approaches to World Order*, Robert Cox and Timothy J. Sinclair eds. (Cambridge: University Press 1996) pp. 165-166

[xxviii] Ibid 36

[xxix] Ibid

[xxx] Cox p.166

[xxxi] Abo-Kazleh p.52

[xxxii] Sayyed Qutb *Milestones* (1981) 55-62

[xxxiii] <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/>

[xxxiv] Lawrence Davidson, *Islamic Fundamentalism* (Westport Conn, Greenwood Press: 1998) pp.97-98

[xxxv] Rachel Ehrenfeld and Alyssa A. Lappen, *The Truth About the Muslim Brotherhood*, *Front Page Magazine* (16, June 2006)

[xxxvi] Ragaee p.5

[xxxvii] Cox p.167

[xxxviii] Abo-Kazleh p.45

[xxxix] Ibid p.45

[xl] Ibid 45

[xli] Shalut p.61

[xlii] Ibid

[xliii] Raymond William Baker, *Building the World in the Global Age* in *Religion, Social Practice and Contested Hegemons: Reconstructing the Public Sphere in Muslim Majority Societies* eds. Armando Salvatore and Mark Levine eds. ( N.Y: Palgrave 2005) pp.110-114

[xliv] Ibid

[xlv] Ibid p.116

[xlvi] Cox p.167

[xlvii] Baker p.122

[xlviii] Ibid p.117

# Islam as a Theory of International Relations?

Written by John Turner

[xlix] Ibid

[l] The so called Afghan Arabs were those who migrated en masse from Arab countries to fight in Afghanistan resisting the Soviet invasion that began in 1979 when the communist government in Kabul was overthrown.

[li] Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy, Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2006) p.168

[lii] Interview with Osama bin Laden, 1998 (22/10/08)

[www.freerepublic.com/forum/a3bc0c66d09f2.htm](http://www.freerepublic.com/forum/a3bc0c66d09f2.htm) accessed Jan 25, 2009

[liii] Habeck p.176

[liv] Usama bin Laden interview 1998

[lv] Bruce Livesey, *The Salfist Movement*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/front/special/sala.html> accessed Jan 25, 2005

[lvi] Ibid

[lvii] Habeck p.57

[lviii] Habeck p.63

[lix] Livesey

[lx] Habeck pp.162-163

[lxi] Livesey

[lxii] Habeck p.63

[lxiii] Habeck p.57

[lxiv] Abo-Kazleh p.45

[lxv] Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam : the Search for a New Ummah* (N.Y. Columbia University Press: 2004) p.245

[lxvi] ibid

[lxvii] Habeck p.60

[lxviii] Abdullah Azzam is the founder of the office of services used to recruit fighters for the Mujahedeen.

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Written by John Turner

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