WESTERN IMPERIALISM AND ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM: what relation?

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Evaluating Islamic fundamentalism: different dominant views:

* crazy, jealousy, ‘fascist’?
* cultural identity in face of West?
* legitimate challenge to Western power?

My argument:

* West’s role in the greater Middle East since 19C => rational anti-westernism

...but has taken different forms -

* Secular nationalism dominant 1920s –1970s
* Secular nationalism declines under internal and external pressures

* Rise of Islamic fundamentalism

- different classes and nation states which support it

- its political methods

* My political conclusions.

**ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM**

1 bn Muslims, from Morocco to Indonesia, from Central Asia to West Africa.

1300 year history of Islam and Islamic societies

=> vast variety of ideologies and practices historically and now.

Subject here = very specific political movement of last 30 years or so; call here ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ (IF) =
* anti-modernism: against freedom of thought, civil liberties, secular state; against some science; specifically – 

* states should adopt Sharia law 

* ancient rules of gender and sexuality 

* against West as exporter of modernism 

* against left and ‘Communism’ 

* violence against opponents, including civilians (‘terrorism’).

Current presence:

- Iranian state, Palestinian Authority, Afghanistan 1996-2001 

- large opposition movements in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Pakistan, Somalia....

- clandestine armed groups.
WESTERN IMPERIALISM AND THE ANTI-WESTERN REACTION

1. *Direct* western military/political control + rivalry of Western powers

Formal colonies 18C on:-
- French in N Africa
- Brits in India, Aden,
- Russia in C.Asia

=> rivalries e.g. Afghan War of 1850s

Informally since 19C: British in Egypt, M.E.

1918: Defeat and dismemberment of Ottoman Empire => Britain and France control M.E.

- *create* states of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi, Jordan, Iraq

US since SWW:-

* Creation of Israel as US client;
* ‘Cold’ War v Soviet Union

- US bases in M.E., Turkey in NATO;
- Pakistan v ‘Russia’s India’
- Afghanistan in 1970/80s aimed to *draw in* USSR (‘Create Russia’s Vietnam’).

2. **Securing economic interests of Western capital**

Suez canal: 1956 invasion by Brits and French.

**Oil!**

Ensuring adequate supply

British and US oil companies’ ownership from early 20C

e.g. CIA, MI6 overthrow of Mossadeq in Iran, 1953 => re-privatisation of AIOC/ BP

- State Dept memo: ‘The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and the British are genuinely hated in Iran’.
3. Install and support client states

Mostly dictatorships

Either secular or Islamic (plus Israel)

West defends *ethnic* policies of these states: Israel, Turkey, Iraq.

**Results**

* Popular anti-westernism.

* Capitalist economies of the region:

  Oil producers with very small population (Saudi, Gulf Emirates): Rulers syphon off proceeds

  Rest: Poor (with oil) or very poor (without oil).
OPPOSITION TYPE 1: POPULIST NATIONALISM

* Parties/ movements/ cultures

Modernisation: economic and technical development; education and welfare

Democratic rights

Secular

include Communist Parties.

* States

‘Internal development’ strategy in Third World generally: economic nationalism versus imperial domination.

Big economic role of state
e.g. Ataturk in Turkey
Nehru/Congress Party in India
Nasser in Egypt
Baath in Syria and Iraq
Mossadeq in Iran
FLN in Algeria
Sukarno in Indonesia

Support from USSR.

Pan-Arabism.

DECLINE OF SECULAR NATIONALISM

* Internal contradictions

Subordinate capitalism

Limited internal markets, technologies, capital

State officials enrich selves, operate dictatorships

=> increasing popular opposition, economic and political.
* External pressures from West

Boycott by western companies and banks (except oil)

Pressure from IMF and World Bank to open up to –
- western investment and ownership
- serving western markets by export.

Military action v secular nationalists: -
- Iran 1953
- 1967: Israel invasion of West Bank and Gaza, subsequently S.Lebanon => weakens secular PLO, strengthens Hezbollah.

All => weakening secular nationalism, rise of alternative anti-westernism.
OPPOSITION TYPE 2: ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, 1930s: against British

Huge rise rise 1970s (cf Hindu and Christian fundamentalism). In opposition to –

- Western presence
- Israeli state
- Shah of Iran => 1981- Islamic government
- Secular states in Algeria, Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan etc...

Who supports?

* The poor

Church is able to operate under dictatorships
Appeal for poor:-

(a) progressive

IF groups provide welfare services *versus* secular state’s failures.

(b) conservative/ reactionary

Against unpleasant modern reality, hold onto a (mythical) good life

- male power.

Conservative version links to -

* Sections of the ‘middle class’

- mullahs (Iran...)
- traditional petit bourgeoisie (the bazaar)
- tribal chiefs (e.g. in Afghanistan)

Social position challenged by industrialism, urbanism, modernism =>
anti-modernist ideology, in anti-western garb. Not against markets and capitalism, but against some of their effects.

* Nation states of the region

Not only Iran, but also pro-western states: Saudis, Gulf states, some governments of Pakistan and Turkey.

Promote IF because -

- Islam used to control population

- against left, ‘communists’

- reinforces divisions within population = divide and rule

E.g. -
- Saudi promotion of Wahhabism
- Moslems v Hindus throughout sub-continent
- Pakistan support for Afghan Mujahedeen, Taliban.
- Intra-Islamic rivalries: Sunni v Shia in Iraq
Al Qaida
- emerged from Saudi madrassas
- financed by Saudi elite $ millions.

* Western powers!

Because IF is anti-left.

e.g. US/UK support for Saudi, Pakistan dictatorships

e.g. US support for IF’s in Afghanistan:

* After 1973 secular coup v King – early 1990s: US/Pakistan support Mujahedeen
  - against secular nationalist regime
  - against Soviet Union

* early 1990s – 1996: support and build Taliban and al Qaida, to unify the country and consolidate the anti-left regime.

=> Taliban, al Qaida = West’s Frankenstein?.
Hence: **Ambiguity of IF:**

- expresses different political projects and class interests

- more anti-modernist than anti-imperialist.

**Why does IF use violence against civilians?**

Many anti-western movements in the 3rd world use –
- mass organisation of population
- appeal for support to populations in the West.

IF seldom uses mass mobilisations because -

- within the region would frighten middle class/ upper class/ State backers

- within western countries impossible to seek support because religious specificity and lack universal popular programme

+ IF has no respect for freedom of debate.
Therefore terrorism = a political gesture.

Terrorism *legitimated* by Western terrorism in the region over a long period.

**MY CONCLUSIONS**

Oppose IF programme because -

* Oppose terrorist methods as -

- can’t work
- unleashes US war
- gives all states in region *and* in West excuse to destroy civil rights => directed at liberals and left.

Terrorism *always* plays into hands of states.

* Reactionary policies towards women, sexual freedom

* No useful economic programme for majority in Middle East or elsewhere.
But appreciate good reasons for anti-Westernism:

- Western political/military control, current wars
- economic exploitation
- support for dictatorships.

=> Support organisations in Middle East fighting for –

- basic human rights
- public services and welfare
- economic programme for benefit of the majority.