Contemporary Islamism: Trajectory of a Master Frame

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Abstract

Islamism proposes a vision of a society united by religion above all else – a vision that the West has difficulty theorizing and even comprehending. This vision and the social movements that have accompanied it are firmly rooted in the Muslim world's history and traditions. This paper adopts a frame analytic perspective to examine and understand the progression of political Islam from the nationalism of the interwar period and beyond to the radical jihadism of today. In so doing, it contributes to the literature on framing by providing an analytically rich and theoretically valuable example of framing tactics in social movements. It also contributes to the growing literature on political Islam (Islamism) by providing a new and insightful perspective on its emergence and acceptance in the Muslim world.

Introduction

The emergence of Islamist movements throughout much of the Muslim world since the 1970s remains a source of tension and instability for the contemporary international system. Religion's ability to inspire collective action is not unique to Muslim societies, as religion motivates movement activity in even the most advanced industrial democracies of the West. However, Islamist movements are unique in that they challenge the very nature of modern statehood and the organization of communal life. They present a vision of modernity that is not only distinct from that which is largely taken for granted in the West, but one that is in many ways adversarial to it.

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Since this challenge has such far-reaching implications, a better understanding of Islamist thought's ideological heritage and the movement activity it has inspired has become necessary. Developing such an understanding has proven to be particularly difficult, however, as western scholarship has often appeared ill-equipped to adequately address contemporary Islamism's distinctive nature. Historian Edmund Burke decries this "inability of social scientists either to situate historically the emergence of Islamism or to theorize it" as "our present theoretical embarrassment."[1]

This challenge is brought sharply into focus by the fundamental differences between western characterizations of state and society and those of Islamism. Although western scholarship often assumes distinctions among social, theological, and political spheres of activity to be natural or inherent, such distinctions are not recognized in contemporary Islamism, which entails what Gilles Kepel describes as the "complete and total blend of society, state, culture, and religion."[2] In this context, Islam is understood "not merely as a 'religion' in the narrow sense of theological belief ... but also as a total way of life with guidance for political, economic, and social behavior."[3] As such, Islamism rejects many of the organizing principles of state and society that the West takes for granted.

The implications of such an exclusionary philosophical doctrine extend well beyond the constitution of any particular society. The Islamist worldview, particularly as articulated by Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), one of contemporary Islamism's ideological inspirations, envisions a complete reconstruction of the Muslim world into a single "community of the faithful" wherein faith, devotion, and strict adherence to Islamic law (Shari`ah) are valued above geographic, linguistic, or national distinctions.[4] Within such a community, "Allah alone has sovereignty"[5] and secular claims of national state sovereignty are regarded as idolatry.

Qutb's rhetoric portrays an Islamist society free of internal contradictions and worldly distinctions among Muslims, a vision that "once again made Islamic culture appear superior to Western ideologies, which it could criticize and surmount."[6] This utopian vision of Islamist modernity, however, was not widely embraced during and after decolonization. In fact, prior to the 1970s, a nationalist ideology predominated in most Islamic countries, for nationalism was often the banner under which independence from colonial rule had been achieved.[7]

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, Islamism emerged as a potent ideological force that has challenged – and continues to challenge – nationalist elites for power; one that has left academics struggling to explain why, in an era characterized by ever-increasing secularism, such an

ideology has attracted the support of so many Muslims. While it was once thought that western liberal democracy was poised to achieve universal status as the final form of human government,[8] Islamism's enduring appeal and mobilization potential suggest that contemporary society may confront this alternative vision of modernity for quite some time to come.

To explain why Islamist ideology may have resonated with so many Muslims during the past few decades, as well as how the transition from nationalism to Islamism took place, it is useful to employ the analytic tools of framing, master frames, and the frame alignment process. Employing frame trajectories as an analytic method is valuable because it goes beyond the "intellectual history" type of accounts that fail to analyze metaphors, symbols, and audience responses. It also transcends the traditional sociological approach that treats the "content of ideology or beliefs as either outside the realm of analysis or as a constant."[9] As such, this approach allows us to analyze culture and social movements on a more intimate level and helps us to see how culture, as well as the successful frames based on it, penetrate everyday life in meaningful ways. Framing is particularly relevant in the Muslim tradition, because historical stories and analogies are so important. "Historical allusions … which may seem abstruse to many Americans, are common among Muslims. References to early, even to ancient history are common-place in public discourses."[10]

The presence of a widely accepted belief system, like Islam, is a valuable asset for mobilizing support. Indeed, "throughout its history, Islam has been utilized both by leaders to legitimize their rule and by revolutionaries to denounce it."[11] The extent to which any ideology can mobilize support, however, is more than a matter of its universal appeal or inherent congruence with a population. The existence of some structural or cultural strain or perceived injustice is widely recognized as being essential for collective action, and movements must also have the capacity to acquire and mobilize resources. These conditions have long been recognized as essential for concerted action. However, their mere presence does not wholly determine a movement's success. Movement organizations must actively market their ideologies in order to inspire sympathy and participation.[12] As this paper examines recent political movements in the Muslim world, it will demonstrate just how important this aspect has been to Islamist movements.

Utilizing a frame analytic perspective is a useful exercise for those wishing to understand the rise of political Islam and for movement scholars generally. It provides us with a unique view of political developments in the Muslim world, how Islam as a religion has been appropriated to advance political movements, and how framing has played a key role in the rise and

fall of social movements. Collective action frames provide movements with a perspective through which to perceive the world and a vocabulary with which to describe it. Analytical perspectives provide movement scholars with the same things.

This essay considers the initial popularity of nationalist sentiment during decolonization, how the competing ideologies of the cold war attempted to utilize Islam's social capital, and the eventual emergence of the Islamist movement in light of a frame analytic perspective. By utilizing this conceptual framework, the causes and consequences of political Islam's rise can be better understood.

Collective Action Frames

Drawing from the earlier work of Erving Goffman, David Snow, et al. define a frame as an interpretive schema that "enables individuals 'to locate, perceive, identify, and label' occurrences within their life space and the world out there."[13] A frame guides individuals to interpret a situation or event in a particular way. David Snow and Robert Benford elaborate three functions served by collective action frames. First, they punctuate "the seriousness and injustice of a social condition or redefine as unjust and immoral what was previously seen as unfortunate but perhaps tolerable."[14] Second, collective action frames attribute blame by identifying culpable agents and, third, they prescribe a corrective course of action or remedy.[15] These framing functions are known as motivational, diagnostic, and prognostic, respectfully.

The degree to which an ideology can inspire collective action largely depends on the extent to which a movement's collective action frame is perceived to be congruent with that of the individual's. Thus, one clearly sees how religion can play an important role in social movements. According to S. Marshall and David Snow, "religion often provides both the mobilizing ideology and the organizational basis for collective action."[16] In less developed countries, religion is particularly valuable for establishing congruence, which Snow and others refer to as frame alignment. Frame alignment depends on "the linkage of individual and SMO (social movement organization) interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values, and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complimentary."[17] The SMO's goal is to convince others to perceive the same situation or event as a problem and to endorse the proposed remedy.

In most cases, collective action frames are specific to particular circumstances and movements. Master frames, on the other hand, can give rise to

a number of movements because they structure and constrain how individuals perceive the "world out there" in more general terms. Moreover, they provide a vocabulary from which specific collective action frames may emerge. Considering the role of frames and framing in the SMOs' success can provide a useful perspective from which to understand movement participation and collective action.

The frame analytic perspective is especially useful when applied to the Islamist movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Rather than being concerned with territory or resources, this movement involves a conquest of ideology: "Its aim was to substitute one vision of world community for another."[18] Stated alternatively, its goal was to replace one master frame with another. That being the case, framing plays a central role in this movement's successes and failures.

The central puzzle addressed here is how and why the Muslim world's master frame evolved from nationalism to Islamism. Our research contributes to the existing literature on framing by examining political Islam's trajectory in terms of framing, which provides an analytically rich and theoretically valuable example of framing tactics in social movements. It also contributes to the growing literature addressing political Islam's emergence and offers a new explanation for it by utilizing some familiar analytic tools.

The Trajectory of a Master Frame

Incorporating Islam into the Muslim world's social movements is not a recent phenomenon. Since at least the 1880s, social movements have been "inspired and legitimated in Muslim terms."[19] Indeed, Islam's mobilizing potential has been noted and used throughout the Middle East.[20] In modern times, its politicization has been reflected in three major social movements: the nationalism of pre-independence, the competing ideologies of socialism and capitalism during the cold war era, and the Islamist movement that began in the 1970s. Figure 1 provides a visual outline of these movements' progression and frames.

In the background of each social movement is Islam's pervasive presence. Nationalism employed religious rhetoric to increase its legitimacy, socialism attempted to connect its ideology with that of Islam, and capitalist Muslim countries during the cold war (e.g., Saudi Arabia) used religion and religious adherents to suppress social movements that challenged the status quo. Islam played a major role in each of these movements, to the extent that Snow and Marshall called it a "latent mobilizing structure that, given the right set of strains and grievances, can be tapped or activated."[21] In the late

Figure 1: Trajectory of a Master Frame.

Pre-Independence	1950s	1970s	Late 1990s and 9/11
Colonialism: Nationalism frame.	End of Colonialism: Nationalist leaders try to fit into the state system; pick either communism or capitalism.	Islamism rejects nationalism and state system; only God has sovereignty.	Radical Islam/Jihadism isolates itself. Tries to catalyze the movement through violence.

1970s, the Islamist movement took Islam from a background framing tool to the forefront of a social movement. By tracing this progression using frame analytic processes, we are able to explain and understand it more fully.

The Heritage of Islamic Nationalism

For generations prior to the Second World War, much of the Muslim world outside of the Ottoman Empire was subject to British, French, and Dutch colonialism. To Muslims educated in western-style schools, independence came to imply sovereign and secular statehood, so that by the 1940s and 1950s nationalism had become a powerful mobilizing force. "Resistance to colonial domination was often inspired in the name of nation."[22]

Given that nationalists directly challenged colonial rule, when independence was achieved it was seen largely as a victory for nationalism rather than for Islam. In some instances, traditional religious elites had lost public credibility by not playing a large enough role in the independence struggle. The Muslim Brotherhood in Algeria came to be known as the "Beni oui-oui" (the "Yes-men") tribe.[23] In Libya, Sudan, and other lands, nationalist leaders employed Islamic rhetoric to add legitimacy to their regimes.[24] Meanwhile, in Egypt and elsewhere, would-be national leaders actively sought to eliminate any Islamist opposition – by force if necessary. In 1954, an attempt to assassinate Gamal Abdel Nasser was blamed on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. As a result, many of its members were jailed, exiled, and, in some cases, hanged. Sayyid Qutb suffered this latter fate on August 29, 1966.

Thus, Islam's presence was felt in each nationalist movement: "Islam was merely handled in different ways by different regimes, and was combined with nationalism in ways that varied according to the social class of those who had seized power at the moment of independence."[25] Even though the Muslim world was being divided into secular nation-states, Islam remained an important component of Muslim popular culture and day-to-day politics.

Following independence, the public from whom nationalist regimes sought support had experienced colonialism and its demise first-hand. This experience caused the nationalist master frame to enjoy greater empirical credibility, experiential commensurability, and ideological centrality – the three dimensions that, according to Snow and Benford, determine a frame's resonance and potency.[26] The nationalist frame resonated so widely in part because it identified obvious culpable agents and offered a clear remedy, thus drawing some of its credibility from its successful use of prognostic framing techniques.

Nationalism was actively cultivated by those who would be most empowered by it. It was a potent master frame during this time because it united the people against an identifiable enemy (the colonizers), could reward its supporters, and resonated with the people through its use of Islamic symbols and rhetoric.

Nationalism Discredited and the Ideological Polarization of the Cold War

For much of the Muslim world prior to the 1970s, nationalism served as an appealing ideology and potent master frame. Emergent national leaders were given credit for securing independence following the Second World War and continued to enjoy the support of much of the middle class, whose lives had been greatly improved by decolonization. This support was unsustainable, however, for nationalism, it has been argued, often assumes an antithetical nature.[27] In other words, nationalism resonates as a collective action frame only insofar as the nationalists could identify colonization as an unjust social condition deserving corrective action.

But once independence was achieved, nationalism no longer served as a coherent ideology or collective action frame. Therefore, the prognostic framing function it had employed so effectively before decolonization, and even in the years following it, lost its potency with the changing political situation. This is exemplified by the diverse paths taken by Muslim nations after gaining their independence. Describing this post-independence period, Kepel writes that "nationalist sentiments among Arabs, Turks, Iranians, Pakistanis, Malaysians, Indonesians, and others had fragmented the historic 'land of Islam' into communities with clearly different priorities."[28]

One strategy that nationalists used to shore up their regimes years after decolonization was to try to reinvigorate the nationalist sentiment that had previously served them so well. In 1967, Israel provided an opportunity to do just that. In June of that year, the progressives, led by Nasser, attacked

Israel. In what is now known as the Six Day War, Israel not only defended itself but also expanded its territory. The Arab nationalists were routed, and Nasser was humiliated. Beyond these immediate consequences, however, "the 1967 defeat seriously undermined the ideological edifice of nationalism and created a vacuum."[29]

Also at this time, the international community was engaged in the ideological tug-of-war known as the cold war. After 1958, "the Arab world, and the Islamic world as a whole was split into two blocs."[30] Many of the nationalist regimes that assumed power, such as those in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, advocated a progressive socialist agenda and aligned themselves ideologically with the Soviet Union. Other regimes advocated a far more traditional or socially conservative agenda, as was the case in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi monarchy remained in power throughout the period of colonialism. Any post-Second World War social upheaval there would have upset the balance of power. Thus, the status quo favored the monarchy and, as a consequence, the royal family was adamantly opposed to progressive socialist thought. Due to this opposition, Saudi Arabia and other more conservative nations closely allied themselves with the United States and the West.

Both the West and the East tried to use Islam to their advantage. Riyadh and Washington feared the young urban poor and thus supported the devout bourgeoisie, "whom they felt were best able to neutralize these dangerous new classes; and they were willing to pay in the coin of religious words and symbols whenever necessary."[31] On the other hand, communism wanted to draw on the masses' strength: "Islamism, it was hoped, might turn into an anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist force to overthrow the bourgeoisie."[32] In either case, the ruling regimes' religious legitimacy was carefully fostered. Islam remained a source of political power in the region, and the people's perceptions of the regimes as being congruent with Islam's tenets and tradition granted them a great deal of power and legitimacy. Thus, national leaders actively sought to align their agendas with Islam in the minds of the people.

For example, socialist-leaning regimes "went out of their way to impress upon children that socialism was simply Islam properly understood."[33] This practice could be characterized as frame bridging. According to Benford et al., frame bridging refers to "the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem."[34] In order to align the two frames of Islam and Marxism, socialist regimes emphasized Islam's social justice aspect as well as the ideal of a classless society. "Pamphlets demonstrating the inherently socialist nature of Islam were to be found all over the Muslim world."[35] This frame bridging had far-reaching effects, to the extent that the Syrian Muslim

Brothers were "celebrating the Prophet Muhammad as the first founder of a socialist state."[36]

The alignment of these two frames, however, became increasingly unstable due to the authoritarian tendencies of many socialist regimes. Nationalist elites may have been proclaiming a Marxist ideology, and emphasizing thereby social justice and a classless society, but their actions undermined their message's legitimacy. In terms of framing, a socialist or a Marxist master frame no longer resonated with a large portion of the population because it lacked experiential commensurability. One example is how the Marxist states' "strict censorship of books and the media transformed the written word from an instrument of independence and freedom into a propaganda tool for tightening the new rulers' authoritarian grip on society."[37]

During the period leading up to the 1970s and throughout that decade, the Muslim world was undergoing vast demographic shifts. The generation coming of age was the first one to be born in the era of independence in most of the Muslim world. Its members had no first-hand recollection of the anticolonial tide of liberation that legitimized the ruling nationalist regimes.[38] First-hand experience sustained the nationalist movement for a while, but it died out with the generation that fostered it. However, first-hand experience with Islam and its continued saliency remained.

In the early 1970s, "the conventional idea of Islam as an ideological language in which socialist or more generally republican traditions could be formulated within a specific context gave way to the idea that Islam itself was in a position to represent the perfection of all ideological thought."[39] Islam stopped being just a part of the local political culture that other social movements could draw upon, and instead become a social movement itself. This was the point at which modern Islamist ideology emerged as a potent master frame and mobilizing force throughout the Muslim world.

The Islamist Movement

Social movement literature recognizes the importance of environmental opportunities and social conditions in the success, and even the formation, of social movements.[40] In the case of the Islamist movement, several external factors contributed to its development, and its leaders took advantage of these by "framing political opportunity."[41] For example, "The Afghan jihad against the Soviets became the great cause with which Islamists worldwide identified, moderates and radicals alike. In the minds of many Arabs, jihad supplanted the Palestinian cause and symbolized the shift from nationalism

to Islamism."[42] Additionally, as mentioned earlier, the Six Day War was a major blow to nationalism that resulted in an ideological vacuum. Islamism, as an ideology, was prepared to fill this void and so took advantage of the political opportunity provided by this defeat.

These exogenous factors, combined with the ascent of a new generation, growing discontent with secular elites, and the ideological vacuum left by nationalism and the cold war belief systems, made Islamist ideology far more appealing. Thus, the failure of previous frames facilitated the transition to Islamism. Conservative governments had encouraged Islam as a counter-weight to socialism, and "some of the young leftist intellectuals, as they took stock of their failure to impress the masses, began to convert to Islamism because it seemed a more genuine discourse."[43] Furthermore, increased lit-eracy among the poor allowed the writings of Sayyid Qutb, Mawlana Mawdudi (d. 1979), and other revolutionary leaders to reach a far wider audience throughout the Sunni world. As a result, Islamism began its ascent to the political forefront.

While Marxists emphasized Islam's social justice aspect to bridge Muslim and socialist frames and conservatives relied on the ulama's tradi-tional dominance in interpreting Islamic doctrine and keeping left-leaning youths at bay, Qutb and Mawdudi called upon Muslims to look to the Prophet's life as a direct example of Islamic virtue. In other words, they instructed the devout to use the Prophet's life as a collective action frame.

To Qutb and Mawdudi, notions of "state" and "sovereignty" were idols. Their writings "rejected the values of the nationalists and reactivated Islam as the sole cultural, social, and political standard for behavior among Muslims."[44] Although Qutb was hanged in 1966 by Nasser's nationalist regime, his presence was felt most strongly during the 1970s, when his ide-ology began to resonate with Arab Muslims. "At a stroke," according to Kepel, "he demolished the utopian thinking that underpinned authoritarian nationalism, just as the Prophet himself had broken the idols of the pagans and replaced them with the Islamic ideal. There was no need to define this ideal or to lay out a new program – his listeners already had internalized the original experience of the Prophet."[45] The frame of religion and of the Prophet's life had the key quality of resonating with the masses.

Two sets of interacting factors contributed to a frame's resonance: its credibility and its relative salience for the intended audience.[46] Using the Prophet's life as a frame in Muslim societies scores very high on both accounts. "The fact that Islam represents a native ideological approach is especially important since the ability to 'frame' contemporary grievances through religious discourse and language has allowed the Islamists to eclipse

the ability of other potential critics of the regime (i.e., Marxists, socialists, Nasserists, liberals, and others)."[47] The difference between Islamism and previous movements is that Islamism utilized religion as the very foundation of the movement. Nationalism, socialism, and capitalism all drew upon Islam, but only in order to gain support for the policies and movements they supported for ideological reasons. For them Islam was a means, not the end.

Thus, while the Marxists' frame alignment strategy could be described as *frame bridging*, the Islamist movement's strategy could best be characterized as *frame transformation*. According to Goffman, frame transformation "redefines activities, events, and biographies that are already meaningful from the standpoint of some primary framework."[48] Islamist ideology resonated powerfully throughout much of the Muslim world because the biography it redefined was that of Prophet Muhammad himself. The example of the first Muslims, "the companions of the Prophet and their successors … is very much alive in the heart of anyone brought up in an Islamic culture."[49] Motivated by the writings of Qutb and Mawdudi, Muslims were inspired to look to the Prophet's life and directly to the Qur'an as a standard of conduct and a source of guidance. For Qutb, the Qur'an was seen as "referring to life issues and challenges … and regarded as a book of guidance and inspiration, giving direction in practical affairs as though it had been revealed to address today's problems."[50]

Some critics, Kepel in particular, argue that "the weakness of Qutb's theory lay in the latitude he allowed for the interpretation of exactly what the Prophet's experience had been and how it should be reproduced in the context of the twentieth century."[51] Qutb was executed before he could clarify his ideology and identify a specific course of action, thus leaving Islamism in a state of ideological ambiguity. While some may view this as a weakness, Qutb's inability to specify exactly how Muhammad's example should be reproduced could be construed as an asset to the Islamist movement. In addition, what Kepel refers to as "ideological confusion" could alternatively be characterized as flexibility – a flexibility that is the hallmark of a master frame and may be one of the Islamist movement's greatest strengths.

Islamism: An "Elaborated" Master Frame

In addition to their potency and diagnostic attributions, Snow and Benford distinguish master frames in terms of their linguistic codes. Drawing from the work of Mary Bernstein, Snow and Benford identify two basic linguistic codes: *restricted* and *elaborated*. Restricted linguistic codes are "highly particularistic with respect to meaning and social structure."[52] "As modes of

articulation, [restricted master frames] tend to organize a narrow band of ideas in a tightly interconnected fashion; as modes of interpretation, they provide a constricted range of definitions, thus allowing for little interpretive discretion."[53]

Alternatively, elaborated master frames are, by definition, far more flexible and elastic.[54] They are lexically universalistic and can accommodate a far wider range of ideas and behaviors. Consequently, "they are more inclusive systems that allow for extensive ideational amplification and extension … The elaborated master frame allows for numerous groups to tap it and elaborate their grievances in terms of its problem-solving schema."[55] According to Snow and Benford, "the more elaborated a master frame, the greater its appeal and influence and the more potent the frame."[56] Islamist ideology is an excellent example of an elaborated master frame. And, as Snow and Benford would suggest, numerous Islamist groups have been able to elaborate their grievances and inspire collective action by utilizing this frame. Islamist ideology has been flexible enough to appeal to diverse social groups, even if they vary widely in terms of wealth, education, status, or agenda.

Islamist ideology has been particularly appealing to the young urban poor, who have often seen it in social revolutionary terms. At the same time, the Islamist movement has attracted support from the devout bourgeoisie. Unlike the former's more radical aspirations, the devout bourgeoisie have not been particularly inclined to advocate mass social upheaval. Instead, they have seen Islamism as "a vehicle for wresting control for themselves from the incumbent elites, without fundamentally disturbing the existing social hierarchies."[57] A more rigid master frame could not have united and mobilized these two groups under a common ideology. But under the Islamist frame, "everyone in the movement could interpret this ideology as they chose, given the opaqueness of the religious language in which it was couched."[58] This meant that the Islamist frame's reach extended beyond what it would have been with a more restricted linguistic code. Thus, Kepel's contention that the Islamist ideal's ambiguity has been a source of "ideological confusion" and weakness for the Islamist movement requires further scrutiny. If anything, this flexibility has been the source of its success.

Iran

The utility of such an elaborated master frame can be seen in the success of the Iranian revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah in 1979 and

established a theocracy, a victory that was not replicated anywhere in the Sunni world. By mobilizing what he termed *the disinherited*, Khomeini was able to "unite, in a single irresistible dynamic, the merchants, the poor, and even the secular middle class."[59] Kepel attributes Khomeini's triumph to his "extraordinary ability to unify the various components ... Khomeini allowed each group to invest the movement with its own political dreams ... to unite in the common expectation of an Islamic Republic."[60] Thus, in the case of Iran, the very flexibility of the Islamist frame that Khomeini employed was instrumental in its resonance. Had the Islamist master frame been more specific regarding its concrete implications, these diverse social groups may have united under a different banner, or not at all.

Evidence of Khomeini's attempts to remain ambiguous as to his envisioned revolution's concrete implications, while at the same time generating mass appeal, can be found in the texts of his speeches and sermons. In Najaf in 1970, he proclaimed that "Islam is the religion of militant individuals who are committed to truth and justice. It is the religion of those who desire freedom and independence. It is the school of those who struggle against imperialism." He then called on his supporters to "fulfill the ordinances of Islam and create a government that will assure their happiness and allow them to live lives worthy of human beings." Such a government "itself," he claimed, "elicits immediate assent and has little need of demonstration, for anyone who has some general awareness of the beliefs and ordinances of Islam will unhesitatingly give his assent."[61] The particular nature of such a government was left to the interpretation of those he called to action.

Additionally, the resonance of the label Khomeini used to generate sympathy among the populace, the "disinherited," may have much to do with Iran's Shi`ite majority. Apart from Iran, the Muslim world is predominantly Sunni. Historically, Shi`ites have rejected Sunni dominance and many Shi`ites have considered Sunnis to be usurpers. Reciprocally, there is a tendency among Sunnis to consider Shi`ites as heretics. By referencing historical differences between the two groups, Khomeini tapped into a distinction that was important to his audience. When considered in combination with his inclusive rhetoric regarding who would benefit from an Islamist theocracy, one may conclude that Khomeini's framing was successful because it was flexible enough to include groups as disparate as revolutionary students and the religious middle class, while at the same time emphasizing the isolation and uniqueness of the local religious beliefs, a point that resonated well with his audience.

The Movement's Transformation and Subsequent Decline: From Islamism to Jihadism

The necessity of such an elaborated frame can be seen in the Islamist movement's decline throughout the Sunni world in the 1990s. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 attracted Islamists from all over the world. Efforts to repel the Soviets, funded in large part by the United States and Saudi Arabia, drew Islamists together in secluded training camps to wage war against the Soviet Union in the name of Islam. The Soviet army's evacuation in 1989 is often characterized as a triumph of Islamism, comparable to the Yom Kippur war of 1973.

The Islamist master frame's refinement during this period, however, undermined its ideology's broad appeal. Jihadists "lived in close communities, where they received intensive training in guerrilla warfare techniques and built up a variant of Islamist ideology based on armed struggle and extreme religious rigor."[62] As one might expect from these circumstances, the processes of groupthink and group polarization resulted in Islamist ideology becoming more radical and divisive. As Kepel claims, "the extreme ideology and violence they endorsed cut them off from social milieus that had formerly been most friendly to them … A gulf had opened between the aims of the 1990s jihad extremists and the social, political, and cultural aspirations of Muslims during the 1980s, and it brought the Islamist movement to a standstill."[63] This decline in popularity "grows partly out of the way Islam-in-opposition has conducted its struggle … with the Verses of the Sword always there for the invoking, Islamism has a tendency to gravitate toward its own most extreme expression."[64] This decline can be ascribed to the Islamist master frame becoming far more restricted.

One could also interpret this pattern of decline in light of what Snow and Benford characterize as cycles of protest. Sidney Tarrow defined such cycles as "sequences of escalating collective action that are of greater frequency and intensity than normal."[65] This perspective emphasizes the temporal dependence often displayed by social movements. They write that "movements that surface early in a cycle of protest are likely to function as progenitors of master frames that provide the ideational and interpretive anchoring for subsequent movements within the cycle."[66]

Prior to the Soviet invasion, the Islamist movement typically had no specific, concrete prescription regarding methods and tactics. That was one of its strengths. Consequently, the movement's decline should not be attributed to a shift in ideology, but rather to the refining of the Islamist collective action frame into something Snow and Benford would characterize as a

restricted master frame. The jihadist movement strengthened its prognostic framing tactics, but at the cost of its previously broad-based support. Identifying means and tactics served to mobilize those within the Islamist movement who endorsed such strategies; however, this increased mobilization and commitment came at the cost of the larger society's widespread support. The resulting isolation only further polarized its adherents and amplified their militancy.

Islamist movements throughout the Muslim world have suffered as a result of the Islamist master frame becoming increasingly restricted. Even in Iran, where Islamism inspired Khomeini's 1979 revolution, Islamism's legitimacy is threatened by a more pronounced division between religion and politics. In 2005, outgoing President Khatami said: "My greatest achievement in the last eight years was giving Islam a new international image and separating it from the Islamism of [the] Taliban and al-Qaeda."[67] Thus, Islamism has been denied sole claim to the master frame of Islam.

Jihadist Attempts to Catalyze Islamist Sentiment

By the mid-1990s, the Islamist movement was fairly isolated due to the restricted nature of its framing techniques. It was at this time that the Islamist movement, now in its extreme form, found itself facing a political impasse. It rejected the ideologies of the West and even of Islamic moderates. "As a result, raw terrorism in its most spectacular and destructive form became its main option for reviving armed struggle in the new millennium."[68]

It appears that Islamism has drifted far from its original purposes. The jihadists' restricted framing techniques and violent tactics have greatly limited its appeal. But are these alienated Islamists learning from their mistakes and trying to broaden their ideological reach? One indication that this may be the case is the modern jihadists' rhetoric: "Bin Laden and his companions have been at pains to construct an image of themselves modeled on the Prophet Mohammed and his followers," who were forced to flee Makkah in 622 and raid their enemies for years before finally returning in triumph.[69] At the same time that al-Qaeda and other extremists Islamist groups use radical tactics, they "sanctify their action through pious references to Islamic texts, notably the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet."[70]

The attempt to identify jihadists with seventh-century Muslims began with the conflict against the Soviets in Afghanistan. The jihadists' image as early followers of the Prophet was "further strengthened by the disproportionate, 'heroic' dimension of the war, waged by a small group of fighters" against such a great power[71] – an image that was purposefully evoked again

on September 11, 2001. The imagery that compares isolated jihadists to fol-
lowers of the Prophet is powerful, because, as we have seen, using his life
as a collective action frame has proven very effective in the past.

Additionally, modern jihadist rhetoric is occasionally reminiscent of the
nationalism of the colonial era. In 1996, Bin Laden told Robert Fisk that
"our country has become an American colony,"[72] referring to the American
use of Saudi land for military bases during the first Gulf war. That statement
has a clearly nationalistic ring to it, but more worrisome is the fact that it
"resonates even among many Saudis who have no interest in the 'fundamen-
talist' dimensions of Bin Laden's thought."[73]

While the framing intentions of these radical Islamists are certainly
debatable, the fact that 9/11 brought their ideology to the world's attention
is not. It may be that recent violent jihadi acts are an attempt to catalyze the
Islamic public and restore to the movement the resonance and influence it
had enjoyed throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The jihadists' seemingly
astute use of frames that have a record of proven success indicates that while
Muslims may accept their ideology, for the time being their violent tactics
keep many of the same Muslims out of the mainstream.

Additionally, it is important to consider the framing opportunities pro-
vided by exogenous factors. For instance, American involvement in Iraq
may be the political opportunity leaders like Bin Laden are waiting to
exploit. In 2001, Bin Laden evoked the images of suffering Muslims around
the world in a speech: "As we speak, a million children are dying, killed in
Iraq … Today, Israeli tanks are ransacking Palestine."[74] Mentioning these
conflicts and blaming the United States for them "was a ploy that reached
out to sympathizers beyond the Islamist movement"[75] and is reminiscent of
earlier calls for Islamic unity, the heart of the original Islamist movement. In
2004, al-Qaeda seemed to be counting on the mobilizing impact that
American involvement in Iraq could produce, to the extent of claiming:
"Being targeted by an enemy is what will rouse us from our slumber."[76] In a
recent book, Robert Jervis provided additional support for this idea by stat-
ing that "although September 11 was not a 'clash of civilizations' [Bin
Laden] may have hoped to generate one, and in precipitating the attack on
Iraq, may have succeeded."[77]

If the radical jihadist movement has learned from the experiences of
political Islam in the past, its members may be trying to catalyze what was
once an alienated and alienating movement. An intercepted letter (see
appendix 1 below) between Ayman al-Zawahiri and the late Abu Musab al-
Zarqawi, two senior al-Qaeda leaders, dated July 9, 2005, illustrates the rad-

ical Islamists' concern with their movement's failure to achieve wider appeal: "Our planning must strive to involve the masses … and bring them in."[78] Referring specifically to videotaped beheadings, al-Zawahiri counsels: "The movement must avoid any actions that the public do[es] not understand or approve."[79] Al-Qaeda seems to be recognizing the alienating effect of extreme violence and attempting to correct for it in order to garner wider support. The combination of religious framing, advantageous political opportunities, and eerily familiar pleas for Islamic unity may be enough to mobilize (or remobilize) a social movement.[80]

Conclusion

This paper may have raised more questions that it has answered. While we now understand the framing trajectory that led from nationalism to Islamism, the future of political Islam and the role that jihadism (a more restricted variant of Islamism) will play in it is still unknown. Was 9/11 a catalyzing event that will usher in a new era of more radical and violent Islamism, or was it the death throes of a declining movement clung to by only its most extreme supporters? At this time, it is unclear; the future of Islamism could lie down either path. What is clear is that a lot will depend upon how the movement is framed, who it reaches out to, and who will identify with this new cause. "If the leadership of Al-Qa'ida can persuade the world of Islam to accept their views and their leadership, then a long and bitter struggle lies ahead."[81] The history of political Islam has shown the importance of framing; understanding its progression can help prepare us for what the future may bring.

This essay has struggled with the difficult problem of providing a generalizable, comprehensive explanation that addresses the successes and failures of political Islam's various social movements. Rather than being a homogeneous, singular civilization, the Muslim world is characterized by a great many historical and sociopolitical differences. The degree to which any master frame resonates with the citizenry depends quite a bit on contextual features. Each Muslim country is unique, and much of any interpretation will necessarily be specific to the context. Utilizing a frame analytic approach, however, provides a unifying perspective through which each movement can be better understood and deepens our understanding of the role of framing tactics in social movements. As with any cluster of broad generalization, though, further empirical application would be beneficial.

Appendix 1

Excerpts from an intercepted letter sent from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi dated July 9, 2005. Translation by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Full text at www.dni.gov/release_letter_101105.html.

> If we look at the two short-term goals, which are removing the Americans and establishing an Islamic amirate in Iraq, or a caliphate if possible, then, we will see that the strongest weapon which the mujahedeen enjoy – after the help and granting of success by God – is popular support from the Muslim masses in Iraq, and the surrounding Muslim countries. So, we must maintain this support as best we can, and we should strive to increase it, on the condition that striving for that support does not lead to any concession in the laws of the Sharia.
>
> …
>
> And it's very important that you allow me to elaborate a little here on this issue of popular support. In the absence of this popular support, the Islamic mujahed movement would be crushed in the shadows, far from the masses who are distracted or fearful, and the struggle between the Jihadist elite and the arrogant authorities would be confined to prison dungeons far from the public and the light of day. This is precisely what the secular, apostate forces that are controlling our countries are striving for. These forces don't desire to wipe out the mujahed Islamic movement, rather they are stealthily striving to separate it from the misguided or frightened Muslim masses … Therefore, our planning must strive to involve the Muslim masses in the battle, and to bring the mujahed movement to the masses and not conduct the struggle far from them … Therefore, the mujahed movement must avoid any action that the masses do not understand or approve.
>
> …
>
> We don't want to repeat the mistake of the Taliban, who restricted participation in governance to the students and the people of Qandahar alone. They did not have any representation for the Afghan people in their ruling regime, so the result was that the Afghan people disengaged themselves from them.
>
> …
>
> Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable – also – are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages. You shouldn't be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men and their description of you as the shaykh of the slaughterers, etc. They do not express the general view of the admirer and the supporter of the resistance in Iraq, and of you in particular by the favor and blessing of God.
>
> …

I say to you: that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma.

Endnotes

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