

Introduction

It Did Happen Here

History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme.

—*Attributed to Mark Twain*

The Middle East in recent years has been, in some ways, very much as Northwestern Europe was 450 years ago. Then, a wave of insurrection rolled across three Western countries and threatened to break over more. In 1560 the wave struck Scotland; in 1562, France; in 1567, the Netherlands.

Each insurrection was different, because each country was different. Scotland was a relatively isolated land, of rugged terrain and small population, perpetually worried about invasion from its southern neighbor England. France was a great power, with vast farmlands and wealth, its rulers longtime rivals with those of Spain for supremacy in Europe. The Netherlands or Low Countries were small, also relatively prosperous, and directly ruled by Spain. As is always the case, rebels within and across the countries had diverse complaints and motivations.

But the three revolts had much in common. In contrast to the peasant rebellions that sometimes shook parts of early modern Europe, all three were led by nobles—landowning men with titles, trained for war. The Scottish, French, and Dutch nobles all, in a sense, were playing out an old story, fighting back against a monarch trying to centralize power at their expense. In the Scottish and Dutch cases, the monarch was a foreigner: French for the Scots, Spanish for the Dutch. Perhaps most strikingly, the leaders of all three sets of rebellious aristocrats—and probably most of the common men who fought for them—were believers in a Christian creed that was, depending upon one's point of view, either radically new or a faithful retrieval of original Christianity. All

were adherents of a branch of Protestantism founded in the preceding decades by the French theologian John Calvin.

That so many rebels in the three countries were Calvinists—or Reformed, as they also were called—was no coincidence. Calvinists held in common a set of doctrines concerning God and man, among which were that a human being could do nothing to save himself but must rely on the mercy of God, and that God had decided on his own volition whom he would save before he created the world. The Reformed also held distinctive beliefs about how the church was to be organized, how the faithful were to live, and how the church and civil authorities or state should relate. Reformed churches did not have bishops and priests, but instead were governed by elders and deacons. Christians were to aim at holy lives, to “make their calling and election sure,” in the words of St. Peter.¹ And the community itself was to aim at holiness, with the civil and church authorities separated but the former enforcing the teachings of the latter.

This, then, was not the Calvinism of the Presbyterian Church of Main Street, U.S.A., in the twenty-first century or even the nineteenth. Early modern Calvinism was—like the Catholicism, Lutheranism, and other Christian “isms” of the time—a political ideology as well as a set of religious doctrines. It emerged in a time when the social, political, and economic order of Central and Western Europe was built around, and partly by, the Roman Catholic Church. In medieval Europe the Church—parishes, dioceses, religious orders—owned vast tracts of land that generated huge amounts of wealth. Clergy enjoyed deep influence over princes, nobles, and peasants. The legitimacy of the hierarchical social system depended in part on the imprimatur of the Church. Some bishops, including the popes, ruled large territories and could raise their own armies. In the Europe of the sixteenth century, Calvinism at this time was partly defined as anti-Catholicism, and being anti- or pro-Catholic was as much a political as it was a religious commitment.

That raises a second and related similarity among the Scottish, French, and Dutch revolts: all were directed against Catholic monarchs who were tied to the teachings and institutions of the Church of Rome. These were, on one level, anti-Catholic rebellions. The statements and writings of the leaders are in a particular religious idiom; one 1559 manifesto from the Lords of the Congregation was addressed to “the generation of Antichrist, the pestilent prelates and their shavelings within Scotland,” and went on, “We shall begin that same war that God commanded the Israelites to execute against the Canaanites; that is, contract of peace shall never be made, till ye desist from your open idolatry and cruel persecution of God’s children. And this we signify unto you in the name of the eternal God, and of His Son, Jesus Christ, whose verity we profess, and evangel we will have preached, and holy sacraments rightly ministrated, so long as God will assist us to gainstand your idolatry.”² This was not just a

peculiar “way of talking,” a pious adornment of more mundane concerns. Calvinists in all three countries engaged in bouts of iconoclasm, smashing icons in churches because for them such images were idols, stealing glory that rightly belonged to God. The Calvinists had deep and, it seemed at the time, irreconcilable differences with Catholics.

In yet another sense the three insurrections were not coincidental: Calvinists communicated across national boundaries, encouraging and learning from one another, circulating sermons, tracts, letters, and themselves. Historians refer to a “Calvinist International,” a network of Reformed Christians that existed across countries, its nerve center in Calvin’s own adopted city of Geneva. Garrett Mattingly writes that “all of them, everywhere, vibrated to any impulse that stirred their connecting web.” Andrew Pettegree notes that the Dutch Calvinists were encouraged by the Huguenot rebellion in France: “In the year following the outbreak of fighting in France, Dutch Calvinists . . . began to imitate the provocative and confrontational behavior that had brought French evangelicals such success.”³

Catholics, too, existed in all of these countries and had a parallel imperative to suppress Calvinism. They too formed a sophisticated network with its chief node in Rome. The revolts and the attempts to suppress them were really part of a single larger phenomenon, a contest that stretched across Northwestern and Central Europe over religion—and not only religion in the modern sense, but in the sense of the time, when church and state were intimate and a country’s established religion affected its institutions and way of life and how power and wealth were distributed. The root problem was that Western Christendom was torn by a *legitimacy crisis*, a struggle over the best way to order society. The crisis is seen particularly in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation of the time.

Because the legitimacy crisis was *transnational*, with Catholics sympathizing with one another regardless of homeland, and Calvinists doing the same, it is no surprise that the rulers of many countries had a stake in the outcomes of the revolts. Protestant England and Catholic France intervened in the Scottish rebellion. England did the same to help the French Calvinists (or Huguenots). Later the German state of Palatinate joined the Calvinist side, as Spain did the Catholic. In the Netherlands Spanish troops naturally intervened to put down the Calvinists, and English, Huguenot, and German troops helped the Calvinists. Even the Ottoman sultans—who, as Muslim emperors, had no religious stake in the Reformation—became involved, offering to help Lutherans and Calvinists against the Catholic Habsburgs who ruled so much of Europe.

There is more. In the previous decades similar chain reactions had detonated in the Holy Roman Empire—roughly today’s Germany—with Catholics facing off against Lutherans. And well after the 1560s more such chain reactions were to flash through Europe. One in particular was catastrophic: A Calvinist-led revolt

in Bohemia led to intervention and counter-intervention that escalated into the horrific Thirty Years' War (1618–48). While that complex struggle was wiping out perhaps one-fifth of Germany's population, the English Civil War (1642–51) broke out. It was these violent civil and international wars that helped Europeans to see their way, begrudgingly, to the religious toleration that Westerners today take for granted.

One of the three revolts of the 1560s failed. In France, the Huguenots and Catholics fought on and off for several decades, often savagely. A stalemate finally was broken in 1593 when Henry IV, Huguenot champion, agreed to convert to Catholicism so as to take Paris unopposed. ("Paris is well worth a mass," Henry was reported to have said.)

But the Scottish and Dutch revolutions succeeded and invented a new thing in Europe: a Reformed realm. The Scottish insurrectionists won quickly and set up a Reformed (Presbyterian) kingdom in 1560. The Dutch had to fight the Spanish for nearly two decades, but in 1585 they set up the United Provinces of the Netherlands, with the Reformed as the established religion. The Calvinists proved adept not only at mobilizing for rebellion but at consolidating and institutionalizing power.



That was long ago, and it was Europe. But parts of the Muslim world today, in many respects, bear an uncanny resemblance to that time and place. Over the past century, rulers of many majority-Muslim countries have amassed power by weakening other actors in their societies. Some have extended their influence in foreign countries. Networks of ideologues with nodes in places such as Tehran, Riyadh, and Cairo have sliced across Muslim countries, with members in each monitoring, educating, and encouraging their counterparts in others. Where early modern Europe had its religious massacres, the Middle East has had its terrorism—which has extended into Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America, most catastrophically to New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. And of course, waves of rebellion, suppression, revolution, and foreign intervention have taken place periodically within and across Muslim countries. (Throughout this book I use the term "Middle East," by which I mean the vast region stretching from North Africa into Southwest Asia, even though the ideological struggles I analyze extend into parts of sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and some cities in Europe and North America.) Sometimes, when a revolution has succeeded, a new regime, proclaiming a return to Islamic roots, has been established.⁴

It is difficult fully to understand what is going on in these Muslim societies. The history, interests, power, ambitions, and beliefs of the various actors, and

how those things interact, are exceedingly complex. But we can make some headway, and the most straightforward path is for academic and policy experts on the Middle East or Islam to bring to bear their learning. Experts have been doing just that for many years, in works too numerous to begin to mention here. Deep analysis by scholars who speak and read Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, Urdu, and other languages, who know the histories and cultures intimately, is indispensable to policy makers, students, and citizens trying to make sense of the bewildering and fraught dynamics of the Middle East.

But a second, complementary way to understand the Middle East has barely been undertaken. That way involves taking analytical advantage of the West's own history of ideological conflict. For the story of the rolling revolts across Northwestern Europe in the 1560s is only one of many such stories that have a strangely familiar ring. Here, too, is no coincidence. One important reason why the dynamics of Muslim societies and regions so resemble early modern Europe is that *for at least a century the Middle East has been roiled by a legitimacy crisis—a contest over the best way to order society*. It is not Islam the religion that is generating the problems, any more than Calvinist doctrine per se was sowing discord in early modern Europe. It is rather a deep and prolonged disagreement among Muslims over how far Islam ought to shape the laws and institutions of society.

For a number of decades Muslims have argued, organized, formed networks, rebelled, suppressed, allied, befriended, betrayed, killed, and died for the sake of ideology, or visions of the good life and public order. Muslims have been unable to agree on the basic questions of society. They have been polarized within and across countries, sometimes to the point of civil war, and often to the point where many identify more with foreigners who share their principles than with their fellow citizens who do not. The legitimacy crisis has complicated domestic and international politics, creating alliances and enmities that can be especially vicious and resistant to compromise. The crisis has dramatically affected the interests of the United States and other outside powers at particular junctures: the 1952 Egyptian Revolution, 1979 Iranian Revolution, the 2001 al-Qaeda attacks, most recently the Arab Spring that began in late 2010.⁵

Some writers have drawn analogies between these dynamics and ideological struggles in the West's own past.⁶ This book takes that insight much further. It is the first sustained analytical comparison between the Middle East today and various region-wide legitimacy crises in the history of Europe and the Americas—crises that exhibited remarkably similar chains of events. I present lessons about the current upheaval in Muslim societies, and its troubled interactions and interpenetration with the rest of the world, drawn from past ideological struggles in other parts of the globe.

I make two general claims in this book:

1. Understanding political Islam requires understanding its long twilight struggle with secularism.
2. Understanding that Islamist-secularist struggle requires that we understand the origins, dynamics, and ultimate end of similar ideological struggles in the history of the Western world.

Although I describe the content of each ideology—Lutheranism, monarchism, liberalism, Islamism, and so on—I abstract from that content and focus simply on the fact that each ideology was caught in a struggle with one or more alternatives. Content does matter, and these ideologies have varied widely in goals, strategies, and tactics. Radical Calvinists, republicans, and communists never engaged in suicide bombing, as radical Islamists do. Many Islamists appear to want only to be left alone by the non-Muslim world, whereas many Western ideologies have had global ambitions. But I deliberately pass over these important differences because the formal similarities—the fact of ideological competition—are striking and instructive enough for one book. They show that much of what we think about political Islam is wrong.

The Rhyme of History

In the following pages, I draw lessons from three long periods in which Western societies were divided, internally and internationally, over the best way to order society and powerful ideological movements stretched across entire regions, agitating for change and disrupting “normal” domestic and international politics.

The first is the struggle between Catholics and Protestants over which form of Christianity should be established or favored by the state. This contest raged in Western and Central Europe from roughly 1520 until around the 1690s.

The second struggle emerged in the 1770s and endured for a century. In Europe and the Americas people differed deeply over whether the best regime was a monarchy, with a king and subjects, or a republic, where authorities were elected and people were citizens.

The third struggle arose in the 1910s and lasted until the late 1980s. The struggle most familiar to today’s readers, it raged among communism, liberalism, and fascism.

In each of these long contests ideologies mutated, and some of the mutations survived and competed with the originals. In the first, Protestantism began as Lutheranism in Germany, quickly developed a Zwinglian version in

Switzerland and Anabaptism in Germany, then a Calvinist version in France, an Anglican one in England, and still other versions elsewhere. Calvinists and Lutherans became serious rivals at certain points. In the second contest, monarchists were divided between absolutists, who maintained that kings had their title to rule directly from God and were constrained only by him, and constitutionalists, who insisted that monarchs must be constrained by representative legislatures. In the third, communists divided into many groups, with Chinese (Maoists) and Soviets falling into a severe rivalry in the 1960s.

The same is true of the Middle East today. Ideological disagreements among Muslims are many and serious, but the most fundamental line is between *secularists* and *Islamists*. The nub of the question is, in a sense, who or what is sovereign in society, and the chief sign of this is the source and content of the law. Islamists insist that law must be *Sharia*, derived from the sacred texts of Islam—the Quran, or direct revelation from Allah to the Prophet Muhammad, and the Hadith, or sayings of the Prophet. Secularists counter that law should derive from human reason and experience, not from Islam (or, for moderate secularists, not from Islam alone).

These two ideologies, secularism and Islamism, originated as negations of one another. Secularism came to the Muslim world with European colonialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁷ Many Muslim elites in the Middle East adopted it in the twentieth century precisely because of the power of the European states that had long surpassed and humiliated the Ottoman Empire, generally regarded as the caliphate or universal Islamic polity. The Ottoman Empire was built upon traditional Islamic social and political institutions, and Muslim military and political elites in particular saw secularism as the remedy.

Islamists typically present their ideology not as an “ism” but as simply Islam, the pristine religion of the Prophet. In fact, their belief system has modern features and arose in reaction to secularism, from both European colonizers and Muslim modernists. Early Islamists such as Egypt’s Hassan al-Banna (1906–49), British India’s Abul Ala Maududi (1903–79), and Iran’s Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–89) were convinced that it was hard to live as a pious Muslim under a secular regime, and began to push back in the second quarter of the twentieth century by organizing cultural resistance movements. In the 1950s Islamists became more radical and began advocating, in various ways, for an end to secular regimes and a return to state-enforced Sharia.

From the 1920s through late 1960s, secularism had the whip hand. After the Ottoman Empire’s defeat in the First World War, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938) dissolved it, abolished the old caliphate, and founded modern Turkey, the prototypical secular Muslim state that explicitly repudiated the traditional Islamic organization of society and adopted Western norms and practices. Atatürk had admirers and imitators in other Muslim countries. Typically

these were military officers and intellectuals who chafed under Western domination and wanted to build modern, independent states. Reza Shah Pahlavi (1878–1944) in Iran was one; Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948) in Pakistan was another; Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–70) in Egypt was a third.⁸ Nasser and his circle also were influenced by the Syrian intellectual Michel Aflaq (whose background was Christian) and the Ba’athist, or Arab nationalist, movement that he helped found.⁹ Nasser’s Arab socialism had a following across the Arab world and led to the establishment of Ba’athist regimes in Syria and Iraq. Secularism even threatened the conservative Saudi monarchy, and Egypt and Saudi Arabia fought a Vietnam-like proxy war in Yemen in the 1960s.

The turning point, scholars say in hindsight, came in 1967. Israel’s quick and crushing defeat of the armies of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in the Six-Day War represented a fundamental failure for Nasser and his secularist project. Evidently casting aside Islam and becoming like a Western state was not the way to free Muslim societies from outside domination. An alternative program for success, long opposed to secularism, already enjoyed support among clergy and some lay Muslims.¹⁰ The Muslim Brotherhood propagated their narrative that the real reason behind Muslims’ failures was their abandonment of the true religion. “Islam is the solution” became a slogan not of quaint old men but, increasingly, of the young. The Iranian Revolution in 1979, establishing the Islamic Republic, sent shock waves across the Middle East; it was a sign that Islamism was for real. Even secular rulers such as Anwar el-Sadat in Egypt and Zia ul-Haq in Pakistan began to adopt more Islamic slogans and institutions.¹¹

French political scientist Gilles Kepel was among the first to note that the Islamic revival has coincided roughly with revivals in Christianity and Judaism. New “fundamentalist” movements across the globe, including in the West, have thwarted the confident predictions of modernization theorists in the 1950s and 1960s that revealed or traditional religion was dying away.¹² Hinduism has joined the general revival, as has (in some places) Buddhism. All of these movements not only falsify the claim that modern technology necessarily brings religious skepticism or indifference but also entail a skepticism or hostility toward secularism itself.¹³ Although I return at the book’s very end to parallels between America’s culture wars and the struggles in the Middle East—particularly how Americans disagree on the goodness and role of traditional institutions that come between individual and state—in this book I limit my focus to Islam and the Middle East. Each of the revival movements in other religions is consequential in specific nations, but none has established a theocratic state in the modern era, nor does any possess the transnational power of Islamism. As Kepel notes, in the West in particular the acceptance of democracy by Christians and Jews has constrained revivalists from violence and from pressing for transformation of the social order.¹⁴ Po-

litical Islam is of the greatest global consequence, and so it is to political Islam that we must attend.

The Situation Today

Surveys reveal that, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, most Muslims are neither secularist nor Islamist in any pure sense. Islamism and secularism are what social scientists call ideal types. Atatürk was close to being a pure secularist. “We do not consider our principles as dogmas contained in books that are said to come from heaven,” Turkey’s founder declaimed in 1937. “We derive our inspiration, not from heaven, or from an unseen world, but directly from life.”¹⁵ A pure Islamist would be Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), the Egyptian writer sometimes called the “grandfather of al-Qaeda.” “The umma [Islamic world] must be restored to its original form,” wrote Qutb, “so that Islam can once again perform its appointed role as leader of humankind. It is essential to excavate this umma buried beneath the rubble accumulated from generations of ideas, practices, and systems entirely unrelated to Islam and the Islamic way.”¹⁶

Most Muslims fall between these two extremes. We have abundant evidence that, at least in the Middle East, the average Muslim is now leaning Islamist. Large majorities in countries such as Jordan, Egypt, and Pakistan want their laws to derive from the Quran and Hadith (or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). Table 1.1 presents data from a 2012 poll taken by the Pew Research Center.¹⁷

It is worth asking what answers Christians, Hindus, or adherents of other religions would give to these questions if “Quran” were changed to their

Table 1.1.
How much influence should the Quran have on the laws?

| Country | Laws should strictly follow the teachings of the Quran | Laws should follow the values and principles of Islam but not strictly follow the teachings of the Quran | Laws should not be influenced by the teachings of the Quran | Don't know |
|----------|--|--|---|------------|
| Egypt | 60 | 32 | 6 | 2 |
| Jordan | 72 | 26 | 1 | 1 |
| Lebanon | 17 | 35 | 42 | 6 |
| Pakistan | 82 | 15 | 1 | 2 |
| Tunisia | 22 | 64 | 12 | 2 |
| Turkey | 17 | 46 | 27 | 10 |

Source: Pew 2012 Global Attitudes Survey.

Note: Values in the table are percentages of those surveyed.

sacred texts. Perhaps many would at least agree with the statement in the second column, that the “laws should follow the values and principles of” their religion.

What is striking about Table 1.1, however, are the figures in the first column in Egypt, Jordan, and Pakistan, and also the figures in all of the countries if the first two columns are summed. Even in the most secular state in Table 1.1—Lebanon—a slight majority wants the laws either to strictly follow the Quran or to follow Islam’s principles. Since Lebanon’s population is estimated to be 39 percent Christian,¹⁸ it is a safe bet that most of the 42 percent of Lebanese who want no Islamic influence over the laws are Christians, and hence that the great majority of Lebanese Muslims are not strict secularists. A 2007 poll of four Muslim countries—Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan, and Indonesia—revealed that, on average, three out of four respondents agreed that all Muslim countries should have a strict application of Sharia and “keep Western values out.” Two-thirds would prefer a world in which “all Islamic countries [were unified] into a single Islamic state or caliphate.”¹⁹ Behind this trend away from secularism and toward Islamism lies a decided shift in recent decades among Arab intellectuals away from hostility to traditional religion and toward an appreciation of Islam’s cultural significance for Arabs.²⁰

At the same time, recent revolts in Iran, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, and Syria show that most Muslims want democracy or popular rule, thereby departing from what has been mainstream Islamism. As I discuss in later chapters, it is difficult for Westerners to grasp, but today millions of Muslims want both democracy and Islamism and believe they can have both.

In one sense, then, Islamism has already triumphed in the Middle East. The old extreme secularism of the middle twentieth century, in which the state seizes control of the religion so as to eliminate its independent role in public affairs, has retained few followers. In another sense, however, Islamism continues to struggle and encounter resistance to its full ambitions. Muslims continue to disagree over how much influence their religion ought to have over public life and the role of the clergy in government. Today’s secularists are those who call for less rather than none. Islamists, meanwhile, differ among themselves over which version of Islam is normative and whether violence and revolution or law and reform are the better routes to Sharia.

Thus the legitimacy crisis continues in various forms—some violent, some peaceful, some open, some hidden—across the Middle East. Well into the second decade of the twenty-first century, in Afghanistan, NATO forces struggled against a remarkably robust set of jihadists. The Taliban (who ruled most of Afghanistan until toppled by U.S. and Afghan forces in October 2001), the Haqqani Network, and others greatly complicated Western efforts to build a stable and friendly Afghanistan. To the immediate east was Pakistan, a country

with a secular founding and tradition whose army was deeply penetrated by a powerful Islamist cohort. The Pakistani Taliban virtually ran parts of the country that border Afghanistan. Pakistan's perpetually troubled relations with its giant eastern neighbor India were entangled with its Islamists' militancy. The problem was especially acute because Pakistan has a nuclear arsenal that outsiders estimate at between 90 and 110 warheads.²¹

Lodged between Iraq and Afghanistan is the Islamic Republic of Iran, which enjoyed a remarkable rise in power in the Middle East in the preceding decade. For a number of years it had been on a path to develop nuclear weapons and medium-range missiles; it had deep influence in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine via ideological networks; it was an avowed enemy of the United States and Israel.

The trouble extended to the southwest. Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil producer, was itself an Islamist state. Its Wahhabist form of Sunni Islam gave it the world's strictest form of Sharia. Its longtime cooperation with the United States over oil prices, its generally moderate foreign policy stance, and the legendary profligacy and hypocrisy of many members of its swollen royal family generated a potent radical Islamist opposition. The late Osama bin Laden, responsible for the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, had been a leader of this opposition, exiled from Saudi Arabia because he sought the overthrow of the House of Saud.

The Saudis and their wealthy small Gulf Arab neighbors worried about their own domestic terrorist threats, as well as about the expanding power of Iran just across the Persian Gulf. The Saudis' Sunni version of Islamism vied with Iran's Shia-Islamism for supremacy, and that ideological struggle exacerbated the rivalry between the states of Iran and Saudi Arabia themselves. Yemen, the Saudis' impoverished southern neighbor, was torn by a radical Islamist insurrection.

To the northwest, the nascent country of Palestine was cut in two not only by geography: the West Bank was ruled by the secular Palestinian Authority, and Gaza, by the Islamist Hamas. In Lebanon, Hezbollah, a Shia-Islamist group funded by Iran, held sway in the south, bordering Israel, and part of the capital Beirut, alienating Druze, Christians, and other Lebanese. Still farther northward, in Turkey secularists feared that their country was already ruled by closet fundamentalists waiting for the right time to impose Islamic law. The probability was not trivial that at some point the army, guardian of Turkey's secular Kemalist tradition, would carry out a coup d'état. And Syria was being thrashed by a horrific civil war, its secularist regime pitted against a divided and largely jihadi-Islamist opposition. Each side was ruthless and the violence drove millions of refugees, many of them radicalized, into neighboring Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey.

To the southwest, in Africa, some countries were on a knife's edge, others going through civil violence and brutal repression. In less than three years

Egypt had careened from a secular regime to an Islamicizing one (following the 2011 revolution) and back to a secular one (following the 2013 military coup d'état). The Arab Spring of 2010–12 had left Libya under something approaching anarchy. Only Tunisia had come out of the Spring with something like a stable pluralist democracy. To the south, in the Sahel, where Muslim and Christian Africa meet and many adherents of both religions favor making their sacred texts the law of the land, conflicts ignited regularly in Mali, Nigeria, the Central African Republic, and on eastward.²²

Six Lessons

What can the West's own history of transnational ideological conflict teach us about the struggles of political Islam? To preview what follows, I use the analytical leverage provided by the three historical Western ideological contests to extract six lessons concerning political Islam and secularism today.

Lesson 1: Don't Sell Islamism Short

The imminent demise of political Islam has been declared ever since the ideology emerged in the 1920s. But rumors of Islamism's death are invariably exaggerated. One reason why Westerners discount Islamism is our own secularist bias, which tells us that a backward-looking ideology such as Islamism cannot last. In past ideological struggles, adherents of one ideology likewise have been prone to underestimate the longevity of their foe, precisely because they believe that their own ideology is the wave of the future. This short selling led to bad policies then, and will do so now as well.

Lesson 2: Ideologies Are (Usually) Not Monolithic

Particularly in the wake of the Arab Spring, debate continues to rage over the question of moderate Islamism—in Turkey, Egypt, and so on—and whether outside powers can or should accommodate moderate or pragmatic Islamists. In past struggles in the West, ideologies nearly always had pragmatic and radical wings. Under some conditions pragmatists were willing to break with radicals and work with adherents of an opposing ideology. But deep, sustained cooperation across ideological lines was always elusive as long as the underlying ideological struggle—the opposing visions for the right ordering of society—endured.

Lesson 3: Foreign Interventions Are Normal

U.S.-led interventions in Afghanistan and especially Iraq have been roundly and often fairly criticized, in both origin and execution. But Western history

shows that such forcible interventions are a normal part of transnational ideological struggles. More than two hundred such cases have occurred over the past five hundred years. They occur because, in such ideologically polarized times, people in “target” states are strongly predisposed toward either friendship or enmity with foreign great powers. Outsiders are sorely tempted to interfere in such polarized countries in order to boost their friends and weaken their enemies. We should expect more foreign interventions as long as Muslims contend over the best way to order their societies.

Lesson 4: A State May Be Rational and Ideological at the Same Time

The venerable tradition in international relations called *realism* insists that ideology is a cloak for material interest. Even revolutionary states, which proclaim that they are following God’s will, or History, have interests like any other state—security and prosperity—and can be dealt with on that basis. History shows, however, that ideologues who rule such states can so reshape circumstances that it actually becomes rational for them to live up to their own propaganda. States such as Habsburg Spain, Napoleonic France, Maoist China, and Islamist Iran can defy Realpolitik for many years and confound the predictions of experienced diplomats and scholars.

Lesson 5: The Winner May Be “None of the Above”

Like all prolonged, region-wide ideological contests, that between Islamism and secularism will end. History shows that such contests may end in one of three ways: with the *victory* of one (as happened with democratic capitalism in the 1980s); with the *transcending* of the contest, when what were once deep, zero-sum divisions become irrelevant (as happened with the Catholic-Protestant contest in the late seventeenth century); or with the emergence and triumph of a hybrid regime and ideology that combines elements of the contestants in ways that had once seemed impossible (as happened with republicanism and monarchism in the 1860s). In the Middle East, an Islamist-secularist hybrid is showing signs of strength today, and outside powers seem little prepared to deal with it.

Lesson 6 : Watch Turkey and Iran

We cannot know when or how the Islamist-secularist struggle will end. But Western history teaches that the eventual winner triumphs by virtue of the relative successes of *exemplary states*—that is, states that exemplify one ideology (or a hybrid). An exemplar that manifestly outperforms exemplars of competing ideologies inspires imitation throughout a region. Thus the U.S. victory over the Soviet Union in the Cold War meant the transnational defeat

of communism and victory of democratic capitalism. Today, Iran exemplifies Islamism, while Turkey exemplifies a new Islamist-secularist hybrid; gauging the relative success of each country can help us predict which regime will eventually come to predominate. Egypt is also an important state, and will likely become an exemplar for whatever regime it settles upon.

A Few Qualifications

Above I noted that most Middle Eastern Muslims are neither extreme Islamists nor extreme secularists, but have moved toward the center; and yet, profound and often violent disagreements remain over how much influence Islam and the clergy ought to have over law and policy. Important, too, is that not all Islamists are of one mind or part of a single unified movement. Islamists disagree sharply with one another as to the content of Sharia, the role of clergy in interpreting it, whether a Sunni or Shia version is correct, and so on. Shia-Islamist Iran is archrival to Sunni-Islamist Saudi Arabia. Iran also is a deadly enemy to the Taliban and welcomed the U.S.-led overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001. Sunni and Shia have fought viciously in post-Saddam Iraq.

It is crucial to recognize, too, that most Islamists are not radical or militant. The great majority say that terrorism is not a legitimate means to increasing Islam's influence in society. A 2013 poll by the Pew Research Center showed that a majority across eleven majority-Muslim countries held unfavorable views of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and pluralities held unfavorable views of Hamas and Hezbollah.²³ These include the countries in Table 1.1, in all of which a majority wants laws to follow the teachings of Islam. The Middle East, then, has millions of what are often called moderate Islamists. Concerning Sunni Islamists it is standard among analysts to distinguish jihadis, who are radical and approve of direct violence, from Ikhwan or Muslim Brothers, who pursue gradual, lawful means.²⁴

That said, it is important to recognize that it is their means, not necessarily their ends, that are moderate. Militants and jihadists are Islamists in a hurry. Moderates are Islamists willing to wait and to compromise along the way.

Secularists, too, are a diverse lot. As mentioned above, old-time absolute secularists are nearly gone. Most secularists grant some role to Islam in shaping laws and institutions. Secularists differ over democracy and individual rights, and how far to admit Islamist parties into power. The Egyptian Army has evinced little attachment to democracy and no qualms about extirpating even nonviolent Islamists. Liberal secularists, by contrast, want to try inclusion in hopes that it will induce moderation. Probably the most famous liberal Muslim secularist in recent years has been Wael Ghonim, the former Google

executive who played an important role in the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in 2011.²⁵ Other prominent liberal secularists are Amr Hamzawy of Egypt and Marwan Muasher of Jordan.²⁶ These reject authoritarianism and seek ways to include Islamists and their concerns in political institutions.

Two Objections

There are reasons to be skeptical about the arguments so far. One type of skeptic will doubt whether the problems of the Middle East named above—unrest, repression, terrorism, revolution, intervention, international tensions—really are linked in any meaningful or causal sense. Better, they say, to analyze each of these separately and to propose separate solutions. Another type of skeptic will doubt that ideology is an important cause of the difficulties and challenges facing Muslim societies. These skeptics argue that the root cause lies somewhere else—in deprivation, or American imperialism, or in Islam itself. I address these objections in order.

Are the Problems Not Actually Connected?

Some skeptics of the importance of ideology say that there is no single problem, but instead a set of unconnected problems. These critics point out that various non-Muslim societies and regions also feature some combination of terrorism, governmental instability, repression, civil conflict, anti-Americanism, and nuclear and missile proliferation. If you want the most threatening nuclear proliferator, look to North Korea. It was the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka—Hindus, not Muslims—who pioneered suicide terrorism. For anti-Americanism, look to Venezuela and Russia. If we conclude that these problems have to do with Muslims, it is because we look only at Muslims. We should rather, say the skeptics, decompose what appears to be a general problem, like an ideology, into smaller problems.

Consider the narrow but significant problem of suicide terrorism, which takes place when the terrorist deliberately kills himself or herself in carrying out the attack. Across history, most terrorism has not been suicidal. But suicide terrorism has proliferated in recent years, and its seeming irrationality—why kill yourself to bring about some change that you will not be around to enjoy, precisely because you will have killed yourself?—makes it particularly terrifying.

Mia Bloom's *Dying to Kill* and Robert Pape's *Dying to Win* are two outstanding recent books that purport to explain suicide terrorism. Both authors show that Islam has no monopoly on this kind of killing. Both gather and analyze data on suicide terrorism in general. Probing as far back as the ancient

world for cases, Bloom argues that two conditions are necessary for actors to turn to suicide terrorism: “when other terrorist or military tactics fail, and when they are in competition with other terrorist groups for popular or financial support.” Suicide terrorism is a way to attract recruits and money by demonstrating extraordinary dedication to the cause.²⁷ Pape makes a different argument, based upon twenty-two hundred cases of suicide bombing since 1980: the primary cause of suicide terrorism is foreign occupation. Suicide terrorists do what they do in order to get foreign troops to leave their country (and they are remarkably successful).²⁸

Mindful that most foreign occupations never provoke any suicide terrorism²⁹—the U.S. occupations of Germany and Japan after the Second World War come to mind—Pape and coauthor James Feldman add in a subsequent book, *Cutting the Fuse*, that two more conditions help cause suicide terrorism: wide religious differences between occupier and occupied (as between the Tamil Tigers, who are Hindu, and the Sinhalese, who are Buddhist), and the failure of other tactics to end the occupation.³⁰ Pape and Feldman note that the frequency of suicide terrorism skyrocketed after 2003, that 90 percent of it is anti-American, and that the vast majority is by occupied against occupier. They conclude that “Islamic fundamentalism” is not an important cause of suicide terrorism.

True enough. It is not the desire that Muslims live under Sharia (Islamism) that causes suicide terrorism. Instead, it is the clash between that desire (Islamism in its various versions) and its rejection (secularism in its various versions) that helps cause this nightmarish practice. But Bloom, Pape and Feldman, and other analysts downplay the causal role of ideology, and the trouble is that they do so by assuming at the outset what they end up claiming to demonstrate—namely, that suicide terrorism is causally unrelated to many of the other phenomena alongside which it has been occurring.³¹ Suicide terrorism in Muslim lands has coincided not only with foreign occupation, but also with governmental instability, corruption, repression of dissent, torture, vehement anti-Americanism, the threat of nuclear proliferation—and of course with the long and severe legitimacy crisis discussed above. In pulling recent cases of suicide terrorism out of their time and place and plugging them into a dataset of cases from very different times and places, scholars may move toward a general explanation of suicide terrorism, but they may move away from a full explanation of the very Middle Eastern cases that we need to explain.

In fact, we have strong reasons to believe that these concurrent problems in the Middle East are all causally related in complex and reciprocal ways. Terrorism is not only caused by U.S. occupations: it helped cause and sustain those occupations to begin with. The Middle East and outsiders who interact with it are caught not in a single problem, or a pair of problems, but in a knot of problems.

Consider that although foreign occupation surely can be a cause of suicide terrorism, the causal arrow seems to run both ways. Why were U.S. troops occupying Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s? Because of the catastrophic suicide attacks of September 11, 2001.³² In turn, the 9/11 attacks were caused at least in part, as Osama bin Laden himself said, by the presence of U.S. troops on the Arabian Peninsula. Those American troops originally were deployed to Arabia in late 1990, in response to Iraq's conquest of Kuwait and threat to invade Saudi Arabia. Iraq had invaded Kuwait in August 1990 because Saddam Hussein's regime needed more oil revenue owing to the costly war against Iran in the 1980s. And the Iran-Iraq War itself, which began in September 1980, was partly caused by the efforts of Iran's then-new Islamist regime to topple Saddam Hussein and vice versa.³³

We could push the chain of events further back in time, but the point should be clear. A full explanation of suicide terrorism in the Middle East today cannot simply reduce to foreign occupation, or that plus the failure of other tactics and the religious distance between occupier and occupied. Islamist suicide terrorism is embedded in a number of chicken-and-egg relationships. It is caused by and causes rebellions, repressions, civil wars, transnational ideological networks, and foreign interventions and quagmires.³⁴

In other words, the Middle East does not just happen to be on an uncanny streak of bad luck. It is not just torn by a coincidental set of separate problems. It has a number of problems that are entangled into one very big problem.

Does any of this matter, in practical terms? Indeed it does. Pape's policy advice follows logically from his explanation. The United States should quit Afghanistan: end the occupations and you end suicide bombing. But if suicide terrorism is one of a number of phenomena that are causally entangled, then quitting Iraq and Afghanistan may not end it. It may even aggravate regime instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the probability of nuclear proliferation, or India's fears of Pakistani militancy. Indeed, perhaps the United States stayed in Afghanistan for so many years because U.S. officials suspected that quitting would only create a situation that required returning later. As this book went to press, Barack Obama became the fourth president in a row to use force in Iraq. He found that pulling one loop of string just tightened the knot.

But Is Ideology So Important?

Some skeptics will agree that the Middle East's political problems, including political extremism and terrorism, are related, but will not like the "knot" metaphor. Instead, they will say, there is one true cause of all of the problems; remove that cause, and the problems would disappear or at least shrivel.

One putative master cause is *deprivation*. The story goes something like this: Muslims, like all people, have a familiar set of needs and wants—security, material goods, dignity—and, as with all people, when denied these goods to a sufficient extent over a sufficient period of time, some turn to violence.

One version of the deprivation thesis is that most Muslims are poor and have little prospect of an improved lot in life. From Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim state, the influential scholar Ahmad Syafii Maarif told an APEC summit in 2006 that poverty causes terrorism; the solution, he said, lies in further international economic integration.³⁵ Management theorist Russell Ackoff and colleagues spoke for many when they asserted that both “fundamentalism” and terrorism are caused by underdevelopment, or the lack of “an increase in the ability and desire to satisfy one’s own needs and legitimate desires and those of others.”³⁶ Ackoff and Johan Strümpfer argue that nations that produce terrorism tend to be those with the least economic freedom.³⁷

The Arab world in particular has been studied closely since 2002 through an annual *Arab Human Development Report (AHDR)*, written by a team of Arab scholars and published by the United Nations Development Program. The 2009 report notes that one in five Arabs lives on less than two dollars per diem. Measured by the Human Poverty Index (HPI), which is a function of life expectancy, literacy, and basic services, Arab states scored at 35 percent, as contrasted with “a 12 percent average in high income countries.”³⁸ Muslims living in Western Europe are less likely to be employed and have less wealth than are native Europeans. In a 2009 Gallup poll only 38 percent of British Muslims said they were employed; the figures in France and Germany were hardly better, 53 percent and 45 percent, respectively.³⁹

A second version of the deprivation thesis is that Muslims lack personal security. In the Middle East and Southwest Asia, most governments have been authoritarian in one form or another since gaining independence from the Europeans or Turks. Islamist regimes in Saudi Arabia and Iran, and secularist regimes in Egypt and Syria, have suppressed individual liberty. Freedom House, a U.S.-based organization that rates countries by degree of individual liberty and democracy, calls the Middle East “the most repressive region in the world.”⁴⁰ The *AHDR 2002* notes, “The wave of democracy that transformed governance in most of Latin America and East Asia in the 1980s and Eastern Europe and much of Central Asia in the late 1980s and early 1990s has barely reached the Arab states.”⁴¹

Part of what we mean by authoritarianism is arbitrary rule: the government is not bound by law; a knock on the door by the secret police could come at any time during any night. Millions of ordinary Muslims in the Middle East live in fear of their rulers. The *AHDR* stresses as well the special plight of the Palestinians, who lack a state and whose territories are under perpetual threat

of invasion and reoccupation by the powerful Israel Defense Forces.⁴² Physically insecure people, so goes the argument, will likely find more acceptable the risks of violence.

A third version of the deprivation thesis is that Muslims have been subject to foreign domination for so many decades that many find it necessary or appealing to strike back with violence. The old formal empires of the British, French, Russians, Turks, and others helped stir up nationalism. In the late nineteenth century the British provoked the Sudanese rebellion of Shaykh Muhammad Ahmad, self-proclaimed Mahdi (savior), whose armies killed the storied British General C. G. Gordon in battle.⁴³ More recently American hegemony over the Arab monarchies and Egypt, and U.S. sponsorship of Israel—which many take to be the West's latest ploy to keep Muslims from ruling Jerusalem—is, to most Muslims, more of the same. Each *AHDR* stresses the baleful effects of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and U.S. occupation of Iraq—not only on the Palestinians and Iraqis but on all Arabs.

So is relative deprivation the cause of the violence, instability, and militancy we see in the Middle East? Each version of the thesis has some validity, but none can explain the full picture.

The first two versions—that Muslims tend to be poor and insecure—cannot explain why other regions of the world with similar or even worse afflictions are not torn by a similar tangle of problems.⁴⁴ Taken as a whole, the poorest region of the world is sub-Saharan Africa. According to the World Bank, in 2005 half of that region's population lived on less than a dollar twenty-five a day. Only 3.6 percent of the population of the Middle East and North Africa did so. (The figure for South Asia, predominantly Hindu, was 40.3 percent; that for East Asia and the Pacific, 16.8 percent.)⁴⁵ At the very least, we see that poverty is insufficient to cause violence, and indeed extreme poverty seems to lower it. Another difficulty is that, regarding terrorism specifically, several rigorous studies claim that poor people are not more likely to become terrorists.⁴⁶

What about American foreign policy? It is suggestive that Latin America, whose people have equal grounds for complaint about U.S. imperialism or hegemony, exhibits nothing like the congeries of problems that we see in the Middle East. There is no suicide bombing; terrorism, yes, but limited to the jungles of Colombia; relatively little regime instability; no evident nuclear or missile proliferation. U.S. Special Forces are active in Colombia against the FARC, and the U.S. Navy can easily reach any target in the Americas quickly. But nothing in Latin America has provoked armed interventions on anything like the scale of those in the Middle East. Venezuela has sought to lead a transnational anti-American movement, but it is minor league beside that of al-Qaeda or even the Iranian government.

Or Is the Problem Islam Itself?

On the other hand are those who blame the problems of the Middle East on the religion of Islam itself. The online world is teeming with opinions of this sort.⁴⁷ Author Robert Spencer has defended the thesis in several influential books.⁴⁸ Ironically, the Netherlands, which may enjoy the strongest reputation for religious and social tolerance, has produced voices (some of which have been silenced) declaiming on Islam's intrinsic viciousness. Here is Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV):

There might be moderate Muslims, but there is no moderate Islam. Islam will never change, because it is build on two rocks that are forever, two fundamental beliefs that will never change, and will never go away. First, there is Quran, Allah's personal word, uncreated, forever, with orders that need to be fulfilled regardless of place or time. And second, there is al-insal al-kamil, the perfect man, Muhammad the role model, whose deeds are to be imitated by all Muslims. And since Muhammad was a warlord and a conqueror we know what to expect.⁴⁹

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali Dutch author who was raised a Muslim, says, "Violence is inherent in Islam—it's a destructive, nihilistic cult of death. It legitimates murder."⁵⁰

Some find the charge plausible. Observe the September 11 attacks and the long wave of suicide terrorism in dozens of countries; the multinational rioting and violence among Muslims following the publication of a Danish cartoon depicting the Prophet Muhammad with a bomb in his turban;⁵¹ an Iranian President's open wish that Israel "disappear from the map" and assertions that the Nazi Holocaust is a myth;⁵² only the Middle East seems to produce such odious actions and statements in such volume.

In 1996 political scientist Samuel Huntington argued that Islam has "bloody borders," that is, that in the late twentieth century an uncannily high percentage of the world's violent conflicts took place between Muslims and non-Muslims: Turks *versus* Greeks, Russian *versus* Chechens, Bosnian Muslims and Albanians *versus* Serbs, Armenians *versus* Azeris, Uighurs *versus* Han Chinese, Muslim *versus* Hindu Indians, and of course Arabs *versus* Jews. In an era when ethnic conflict is common, Huntington argued, no group is as prone to conflict as Muslims.⁵³

Then there is the history of Islam, specifically the way it spread in its early centuries by the sword. The Prophet Muhammad himself was a warrior; after his move to Medina in A.D. 622 (year 2 in the Islamic calendar), he led his followers in fighting and subduing the Meccans, thus establishing his prestige

in Arabia. In the generations after Muhammad's death in 632 (year 12), his successors—the caliphs—conquered parts of the Byzantine Empire to the west, including Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Libya, as well as the Sassanid (Persian) Empire to the east. Islam *was* the caliphate, an empire.⁵⁴ Osama bin Laden's 1996 declaration of war on America appealed to Islamic traditions that valorize holy war. Muslim poets have glorified violent jihad. When bin Laden used the word "martyr" (or "witness"—*Shahid* in Arabic), he had in mind not the peaceful witness who clings to the faith at the cost of his life, but rather the active warrior who dies while using the sword against the faith's enemies.⁵⁵

Do these specific violent incidents and this broad history convict Islam the religion? Not necessarily. Most Muslims never commit acts of violence; if Islam is intrinsically violent, then roughly a billion believers either do not understand their own religion, or are too cowardly or unfaithful to follow its precepts. (The latter, of course, is the claim of the radical Islamists.)

But there are more serious problems with the "it's Islam" thesis. In investigating the claim that "Islam has bloody borders," political scientist Jonathan Fox found that, since the end of the Cold War, there has been no increase overall in violence between Islamic and non-Islamic societies. There has indeed been a rise in violence between Islamic and *Western* societies, but that rise has appeared only since 1989.⁵⁶ That suggests that Muslim violence is dependent upon other factors.

A broad view of the history of the Middle East suggests that Islam is much like other religions. It is marked by times and places of conquest and brutality, but also by times and places of peace. The early caliphates (Umayyad, Abbasid) were expansive empires, but for some stretches of time did not force Christians and animists to convert. The Ottoman Empire was tolerant for its time, allowing religious and ethnic minorities to flourish.⁵⁷ This chapter opened with some episodes from early modern—Christian—Europe, involving violence, unrest, repression, and war. While Catholics and Protestants were doing these things, the Muslim Ottomans were living in relative peace and prosperity.

Indeed, Christendom has had its sustained spasms of violence, both toward outsiders (as in the Crusades) and fellow believers (as in the Counter-Reformation). Christian crusaders from Pierre Dubois in medieval France to Stonewall Jackson in the Confederate States of America have cited the Bible and Christian teaching to justify holy war. As a Christian myself, I would maintain that those who kill in order to expand Christendom are either cynical or terribly mistaken. But many Muslim clergy—even Islamists—lodge a similar charge against radical jihadis who kill in Allah's name. Mohammad Khatami, a former president of Iran and prominent Shia cleric, repeatedly condemned the 9/11 attacks and declared that suicide bombers will not go to heaven.⁵⁸

The point is not that Islam or Christianity is a “religion of peace,” nor is it to establish whether jihadists or their critics are more orthodox. Our concern is how actual self-identifying Muslims and Muslim societies act, and clearly they have acted differently in different times and places.

The Ideological Struggle

The root problem, then, is not poverty, insecurity, or American imperialism. It is not Islam itself. We do not really know what the root is. The best way to think about the Middle East’s problems is that they are a tangle, in which each problem aggravates the others. The knot of problems is self-tightening. And one of those problems, a crucial and misunderstood one, is that for many decades the Middle East and other places where Muslims live have been going through a legitimacy crisis. This crisis polarizes Muslims, sometimes to an extreme, and is partly responsible for the poverty, insecurity, religious violence, and even some of the American intervention that leads to charges of imperialism. Sometimes the polarization has been severe enough to bring civil war. Even when violence has been absent, the crisis has kept Muslims from agreeing on what a good society or regime looks like. It has made people more loyal to foreigners who share their principles than to their own countrymen who do not.

Deep and abiding disagreement over where law should come from helps keep the problems entangled. If we are to understand the Middle East, we must understand the old but ongoing competition between Islamism and secularism.

Once we see the matter this way, we can begin to use the West’s own history—to be precise, its history of prolonged legitimacy crises and bouts of ideological strife—to help us understand what is going on in the Middle East. Plans for ordering public life that call for direct violent action against established rulers and authorities are always out there, being refined in books and tracts, expounded in speeches and sermons, debated in clubs and coffeehouses, dissected in academic seminars. At certain times and in certain places, they have attracted significant followings and have serious domestic and international political consequences.

How do ideologies influence politics? There are two common, and opposite, mistaken views of ideologies. Some people think of them as spirits that possess individuals, or the voices heard by paranoid schizophrenics, and make them do things they otherwise would not (“You will strap this bomb to yourself and blow up everyone at this market!”). Ideologies become like irresistible forces, unseen puppeteers. Others, finding such a view ridiculous, see no alter-

native but to argue that ideologies are not consequential at all. Spirits do not exist, or if they do we cannot observe them; either way they do not belong in a social-scientific explanation. Rather, say these skeptics, ideologies are stories invented by elites trying to manipulate the gullible into doing their bidding. Ideologies do not matter; what do matter are powerful and clever elites.

In fact, as we shall see time and again in this book, ideologies can be more than simply cover stories, but not because they are spirits or mental illnesses. They are what scholars call social facts, such as norms, mores, or cultures. Take a seemingly unrelated topic: clothing styles. Time was, not too many years ago, that adult men in the Western world in white-collar jobs all wore neckties to work. No doubt some—perhaps not many—liked neckties, while others did not like them but believed that they or their organization or society as a whole would pay a high price if they did not wear a necktie. The wearing of neckties was a norm, a socially accepted behavior; going tieless was frowned upon, and few dared do it. Today, the norm has reversed: the open shirt collar has become *de rigueur*, the occasional cravat wearer the nonconformist who makes others uncomfortable and threatens established order.

Norms such as “neckties are a sign of status” or “neckties are for the unhip” are not spirits forcing men to obey. And although some actors have an interest in perpetuating the norm—the silk industry, suit makers—it would be silly to suppose that such interests were able to coerce the entire male Western world until the 1990s. It is plausible that some elites had an interest in a conformist or disciplined society and that neckties were once a tool or sign of that discipline. But note that even then, elite men who hated neckties, whose fondest wish was to get a different gift for Father’s Day, would still have to wear them. The norm would still be powerful.

Like norms, ideologies are neither spirits nor observable objects. And like norms, ideologies can still constrain people, even people who do not believe in them. The more people talk and act according to an ideology, the more others are constrained to do the same and the more people, even cynical elites, come to believe in them.

Ideologies are especially compelling and consequential when competing with other ideologies. It is then that people tend to polarize over ideology—to think of people with whom they agree as friends (regardless of other differences) and of people with whom they disagree as enemies (regardless of other similarities). Conformity, ideological correctness, becomes an important social asset. Nonconformity becomes disruptive and dangerous.

The West’s own history, so scarred with ideological struggles, can help us understand the consequences of the prolonged contest between political Islam and secularism. As I show in the following chapters, sixteenth-century Europeans were not only devout; there were times and places where they were

severely polarized over religion. They felt acutely threatened by people who disagreed with them about sacraments or salvation. Indeed, their vision was a negation of what they took to be their enemies' vision. It often has been noted that one cannot be "Protestant" without something against which to protest. But to be a militant Protestant requires more than the existence of Catholicism; after all, Catholicism exists today, but very little iconoclastic, revolutionary Protestantism does. By the same token, the militant Catholicism of some of the Habsburgs or the Guises in France requires more than the simple presence of Protestantism.

From the 1770s through 1870s in Europe and the Americas, monarchists and republicans often experienced the same severe polarization across national boundaries. A French monarchist felt more in common with an Austrian monarchist than with a French republican. An Italian republican felt more in common with an American than with an Italian monarchist. Waves of revolt, repression, revolution, foreign intervention, and war were partly due to this ideological contest.

During the twentieth century, communists, liberals, and fascists went through very similar struggles, with similar consequences. Communists' explicitly internationalist vision gave them a special reason to communicate and move across national boundaries. But fascists and liberals did likewise, and their periodic polarizations produced all manner of entangled political strife within and across countries. In turn, the political strife—the rebellions and revolutions, the fifth columns and fears thereof, the foreign interventions and shuffling of alliances—fed back into the ideological struggles and prolonged them. That is what we mean by a knot of problems.

Common to all of these periods was not just the presence of ideologies, but a deep struggle among them—a competition that sometimes looked zero-sum. The struggle fed the sense of threat on both sides and supported the notions that the other side could not be compromised with and that direct violent action was necessary. Individual leaders play prominent roles in most of these stories. Charles V, a Holy Roman emperor in the sixteenth century; Frederick V, the Count Palatinate in the early seventeenth; Edmund Burke, the late eighteenth-century British statesman; U.S. President Harry Truman; Atatürk, founder of modern Turkey; the Ayatollah Khomeini: these and scores of others were highly consequential, for good or ill. But one way in which they were consequential was in formulating, propagating, or opposing "isms." Some of the leaders found, too, that the ideologies they thought to control took on lives of their own, shaping the thoughts and expectations of others and constraining the leaders.⁵⁹

For these and other reasons, in the following pages I mine the history of these three long Western struggles—Catholic-Protestant, republican-monarchist,

and communist-liberal-fascist—for lessons about the current ideological contest in the Middle East. I pay more attention to Islamism than to secularism, both because it is far stranger to Westerners and because, in the contest of ideas, it continues to enjoy momentum.

The book contains no technical material. It is not a work of rigorous social science; it does not formulate a deductive theory or test hypotheses according to strict methodological rules. This book is rather a set of arguments based on some remarkable similarities across time and space. It proposes no ultimate solutions, either for Muslims or for the rest of the world. Western history does not yield a clear algorithm for dealing with Islam's political legitimacy crisis. Indeed, as one of the characters in this book—Burke, founder of modern conservatism—would insist, politics does not admit ultimate solutions, and to assert otherwise is to invite disaster. Even the good resolutions recounted in this book were impermanent and bred new problems. But the history of the West does show that leaders and countries can take steps that make better outcomes—temporary, to be sure, but less violent and more conducive to human flourishing—more likely.

Readers should be mindful, too, of the hazards of using historical lessons for present policy. Political scientist Yuen Foong Khong shows how the administration of Lyndon B. Johnson deepened U.S. involvement in Vietnam by employing faulty analogies from the past.⁶⁰ Political scientist Richard Neustadt and historian Ernest May wrote about how to use history for policy, precisely because policy makers so often misuse the past.⁶¹ One lesson of history is to be careful about extracting lessons from history—in particular, not to lurch toward historical analogies that support conclusions we have reached for other reasons. In the following pages I take care to let history speak for itself, but I invite readers to scrutinize the results critically.

People in the West are sometimes perplexed at the sound and fury they see in the Middle East. They forget, if they ever knew, that the West itself, at various times in history, has been loud and furious. And then, as now, the sound and fury did signify something.