

Causes of islamic radicalism



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Problem Solving in a Global Age: Islamic Radicalism

Since the 18th century, the Wahhabi movement vied for the rejection of new Muslim ideas, instead reverting back to the original beliefs set by the Prophet Muhammad (Commins 5). From their roots in Arabia, multiple groups that embraced radical beliefs of Islam grew. They now span the whole globe with major groups such as the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in the Middle East, the Caucasus Emirate in Russia, Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, and Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram in Africa. However, radical Islam originated from the Middle East (Commins 3), an area with a deep history of poverty (Long 7) and, in turn, a history of religious government institutions that only teach upcoming generations militarism and the Quran (Tavernise). Instead of solving for symptoms of Islamic radicalism, it is important to solve for its root cause (Hamid) and help fund nonreligious private education because of the Middle East's importance to the global economy and future relations concerning oil (Tétreault).

The first cause of Islamic radicalism lies in what can be called the 'Western Grip,' the strong presence of American and colonial culture. After World War 2, oil resources developed and sent imperialistic powers to the Middle East. This created a dependency on the Middle East and their resources. However, the relationship between major global oil economic powers and local populations in the areas of extraction has not been fostered; instead, an irreconcilable divide between Islam and the West emerged (Tétreault). Similar to British imperialism, the United States involves itself in the politics of the Middle East and takes it upon itself to solve the Middle East's problems, initiating conflict and invasions. As Western influence increased,

industry created a connection to Western culture, one that includes provocative clothing, music, and habits- all of which go against the fundamentalist interpretation of the Quran. These directly oppose the ideals of the fundamentalists and thus fuel anti-Americanism and further rebellion against modern progression. The reason why such radical religious organizations thrive is by their use of religious persuasion to impose the 'true' interpretation of the religious text. They oppose modernity and instead act on Sharia law, which instead of governing by secular laws, only looks toward Muslim rules and regulations based on strict interpretations by the Quran. In addition, when the United States began to occupy Iraq, it created an anti-American sentiment in the area that only grew as Muslims realized a long history of American negligence and indifference towards supporting followers of Islam (Long 1). Conflicts in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Gaza, directly targeted Muslim victims, and these conflicts are "...given as an example of where Western nations have failed to act quickly or effectively to protect Muslim civilians (Baksh 2). Their occupation of Iraq and their refusal to aid Muslims created a strain on the Middle East's relationship with the United States and further fueled anti- American sentiments while turning to a more radical solution that incorporated their religious values that they place great value onto (Long 201). Another cause of Islamic radicalism in the Middle East is the high poverty rate. Their "...huge variation in oil wealth across the region drives income disparities" (Long 6). Historically, the Middle East has not expanded or modernized along with the rest of the world. Instead, their history shows a reliance to turn to religion whenever they needed consistent governing. This led to the creation of Sharia law and an importance placed on religious education. The poor who live difficult lives were much more

susceptible than those who could afford a strong, secular private education (Long 7). It has been stated that countries like Pakistan have never really taken their education seriously, and rely only on the Quran for educational resources. As students learn about the way of the Prophet Muhammad, most either see no value of further schooling and drop out or they further their religious education and learn how to preach as a career opportunity. Many of the organizations that take up teaching young children and organizing preaching groups have been linked as stepping stones to Al-Qaeda or the Taliban (Tavernise). The third cause of Islamic radicalism is the political backing by Iranian leader Ruhollah Khomeini who had a crucial position in the rise of extremist government. While in power he "...stressed the spiritual over the material," (Sorenson 45) and implemented Sharia law. As fundamentalists first began to pop up and run for official power, there was a tense struggle between factions. As Khomeini backed the radical Muslims, he in turn increased radicalism in Iran and pushed for the execution of moderates. Radical leftist guerrilla groups sprouted all over the area as they became more organized under a provincial government and gained legitimacy and power (Long 59). This highly contrasts to the Philippines where Abu Sayyaf, the major Islamic terrorist organization, has not been able to gain such a strong political backing and thus radical Islam has not been able to grow with such vigor (Ankerson 241)

The primary cause of Islamic radicalism cannot be the Western influence or the politics of Iran. The 'Western Grip' that was created affects many countries but none have spurred radicalisms like countries in the Middle East have. As scholars Long, Reich, and Gasiorowski stated in their book *The*

Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa , “ The inescapable American influence affects almost every other part of the world with no radical consequences,” (23) so why is the Middle East so unique? To find its primary cause, one must look to the root cause of all problems instead of just looking at symptoms, like the politics of Khomeini, who began his radical backing after a mass influx of broken governments and fundamentalist groups who promised to stay true to the Quran and bring Allah’s glory to the area. The Wahhabi movement was another symptom of the people reaching to find stability in their government and life. All of the corruption spurred from the true root cause of Islamic radicalism- poverty. The poor began to and continue to turn to radical ideas because of fewer opportunities in their society other than ones to preach religious ideas. They are facing a socioeconomic delay behind the rest of the world, and it corrupts their education, which builds a foundation for the upcoming generations in the Middle East, thus progressing the radicalism and turning fundamentalism into a standard in the government (Burhania 16).

The most viable solution to Islamic radicalism lies in funding secular education. Other past attempts to go in and fight the groups out has only spurred more violence and backlash against Westerners, pushing the divide between the two regions further and further. Attempts to change the government cause progress but not enough to effect poor areas that radicalism grows from. Instead, it is important to solve their education as “... poor public education forces them to turn to Muslim education sources and breeds radicalism” (Rasizode 54). Education that is secular creates a more

western-positive approach and educates about democracy therefore solving both other causes of Islamic radicalism.

Islamic radicalism is a complex problem that is multifaceted. Although there are many proposed solutions, one must look at how radicalism is bred and how it spurred in the Middle East to see that education could help solve poverty and fundamentalism.