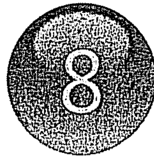

Islam and International Relations in the Middle East: From *Umma* to Nation State

PETER MANDAVILLE

Introduction	177
Islam and international relations: history and key concepts	177
Pan-Islam, colonialism, and the modern state	180
The political economy of Islamic revival	184
Islam and geopolitics	186
Thinking about Islam and foreign policy	188
Islam, globalization, and the 'Arab Spring'	190
Conclusion	194
Further reading	194
Questions	195

Overview

Key international relations concepts have been present in the Islamic tradition for many centuries and Islam has generally been comfortable with the division of the world into sovereign polities. Modern efforts to defeat European imperialism by mobilizing Muslims around the banner of religion proved less effectual than the alternative model found in national self-determination. The leaders of newly established national-secular states in the Middle East have still found it useful from time to time to explain and justify their foreign policies in terms of religion, and on a more limited scale several countries in the region have sought to set up distinctly 'Islamic' states. Islam was viewed by the West as a useful ally in the Cold War fight against communism, although with unforeseen consequences later. The geopolitical significance of energy has also permitted certain oil-producing states in the region to project Islam in their external relations. In more recent years, the dynamics of globalization has seen the political significance of Islam expand to include a wide variety of transnational networks and media spaces. Recent popular revolutions in the Arab world have created opportunities for Islamic movements to enter the political sphere which, in turn, has created a new regional politics around Islamism.

Introduction

As the dominant religion in most societies of the Middle East and a major socio-cultural force in its own right, Islam has had a significant bearing on how states and other actors in the region both think about and conduct international relations. While often dated to the 'Islamic revival' of the 1970s and, more specifically, the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Islam's relevance to international relations in the Middle East can be said to pre-date both the rise of the modern international system and the formation of nation states in the region. Islam played a role in debates about the post-colonial political order in the Middle East, and—at the level of theory—strongly informed much of the thinking and debate on the nation state in the early twentieth century. Coexisting in distinct tension with a prevailing trend towards Arab nationalism after the Second World War, however, political Islam, or 'Islamism', emerged as an ideological critique of the secular nation state in the Middle East. Claiming the identity of an 'Islamic state', other key players in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, sought to use their geopolitical clout and dominant position in global energy markets to claim a pre-eminent role among Muslim nations. Other states in the Middle East, including some of the more secular regimes, have at times sought recourse to the language and symbols of Islam to explain and justify aspects of their foreign policy. Here, Islam has often served to complement, or as a surrogate for, nationalist discourse. The substantive presence of Islam in the foreign policies of Middle Eastern nations—even in the case of those that consider themselves to be Islamic states—is, however, often difficult to discern. While the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has sought to represent Muslim nations in the realm of multilateral diplomacy, the national interests of its individual members have generally prevailed over any common Islamic voice or vision. In the wake of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, an event with important repercussions beyond the Middle East, Iran emerged as a competitor to Saudi Arabia, criticizing the latter's close relationship with the United States. During the latter part of the Cold War, Islam came to be regarded by the US and some of its regional allies as an effective tool with which to combat communism, particularly in the wake of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Iran sought to develop transnational ties with Shi'i groups in other parts of the Middle East, thus having an important impact on, for example, the civil war in Lebanon. In the wake of the Cold War, many of the networks and movements associated with this period have endured, leveraging the trappings of globalization (the Internet, satellite television, diaspora communities) to find new audiences and to redefine their political goals. Similarly, new actors and voices have also emerged, seeking to articulate the relationship between Islam, globalization, and international relations for a new generation. More recently, popular revolutions in the Arab world generated a temporary rise in the political fortunes of Islamist parties in some countries but renewed conflict—often along lines of sectarian and religious identity—in others.

Islam and international relations: history and key concepts

> We made you into nations and tribes so that you may know each other ...
>
> (Qur'ān 49: 13)

The idea of interaction between political communities has been present in the Islamic tradition since it was founded in the seventh century. Not only do the core textual sources of Islam, such as the Qur'ān and Sunna (the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), make mention of key concepts from the world of international relations such as nations, power, political authority, and even treaty making (Qur'ān 8: 72), but we also see in the first centuries of Islamic history plenty of evidence that Muslim political leaders were actively engaged in diplomacy, trade negotiations, and warfare with neighbouring polities. Indeed, by about the eleventh century, centralized political authority within the Muslim world had more or less disappeared, replaced by various regional empires and sultanates. Although the office of the Caliph, as successor to the Prophet Muhammad and nominal political leader of all Muslims, endured in one form or another until after the First World War, the occupant of this office often served as little more than a symbolic figurehead after the decline of the Abbasid Empire in the thirteenth century. There is also a rich history of cultural and intellectual engagement between Muslims and non-Muslims during this period, with Arab philosophers digesting—and augmenting—Greek philosophy and classical learning. Although it is common to think of countries in the Muslim world as being on the 'periphery' of world power relations, quite a different perspective emerges if we look at the configuration of global trade flows in the thirteenth century. At this time, the Indian Ocean emerges as a teeming basin of commercial and diplomatic activity, connecting eastern Africa to the southern coast of Arabia in the Middle East across to Persia, India, and further east of the Malay archipelago. If anything, Europe—still in its medieval slumber—constituted a periphery to the 'centre' of this proto-globalized world system (Abu-Lughod 1989). Nizam al-Mulk's eleventh-century kingship manual, the *Siyasatnama* ('Book of Government'), for example, anticipates by several centuries some of the key themes relating to power, diplomacy, and warfare later found in Niccolò Machiavelli's classic *The Prince* (1532). Europe rapidly re-emerged onto the geopolitical stage from the late fifteenth century, however, and by the early seventeenth century the Ottoman Empire was acceding to trade and military capitulations demanded by the French, marking a geopolitical shift towards Europe.

Several concepts are of particular importance when discussing Islam and politics, perhaps none more so than the oft-cited claim that, unlike Christianity, Islam recognizes no distinction between religion and politics—an idea embodied in the commonly invoked phrase *al-islam din wa dawla* ('Islam is both religion and state'). Despite some evidence that this maxim was introduced to Islamic religio-political discourse only relatively recently (Piscatori 1986), it has been frequently cited in evidence of the argument that secularism and Islam are inherently incompatible. While Islam does not, in theological terms, draw a sharp categorical distinction between worldly power (for example, 'render under Caesar what is Caesar's ...') and divine authority ('and unto God that which is God's'), representing itself instead as a faith system (*din*), the moral guidelines of which apply to all areas of life, one can find throughout Islamic history no shortage of evidence that Muslim political leaders have operated with a sense of religious authority and political power as differentiated spheres of activity (Brown 2000). The concept of sovereignty (*hukm*) in the Islamic tradition is similarly debated. Certain conservative schools of thought in Islam, on the one hand, will argue that the idea of sovereignty as something that belongs to God alone (*al-hukm l'il-allah*) renders illegitimate the sovereign claims of governments and worldly political forces. On the more

progressive end of the spectrum, by contrast, the Islamic green (pro-ecology) movement has used the same logic to argue that humankind—as the custodian of divine creation—has a responsibility to protect the environment. Once again, a survey of the historical record reveals that the theory and practice of territorial sovereignty has had a rich tradition in the Muslim world. This latter point also brings into question the dichotomous world view that some observers ascribe to Islam. It is often said that, according to Islam, the world is divided into two realms, *dar al-Islam* (the domain of Islam) and *dar al-harb* (the domain of war). The former is taken to refer to those lands under the control of a Muslim ruler (and in which, in theory, Islamic law prevails); the latter, to all lands outside Muslim rule and with which Muslims are potentially in conflict. Such a selective and de-contextualized reading leaves one with the impression that Islam considers itself to be at war with any non-Muslim country, and ignores the existence of a wide range of additional categories—such as *dar al-ahd* or *dar al-sulh* (the domain of treaty)—that Muslim political theorists have used at various times to characterize the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim sovereign lands. Of overwhelming importance, as James Piscatori (1986: 145) has argued, 'is the consensus that has evolved over the centuries that Islam tolerates, even endorses, territorial pluralism'.

Given the centrality of war and armed conflict to international relations, it is also important here to consider briefly the notion and role of jihad in Islam. This polysemic concept has been a source of considerable confusion in recent years, with some writers arguing that the term's primary meaning is martial in nature, while others focus on its spiritual dimensions. One thing that can be said for certain is that the translation of *jihad* as 'holy war' is misleading in its characterization. The Arabic root of the term refers generically to the idea of 'struggle', and early Islamic sources draw a distinction between greater and lesser jihad. The former is regarded as an individual's inner struggle to live in accordance with the precepts of Islam, while the latter refers to the outward exertion of efforts to bring the surrounding society into compliance with Islam. This can take a range of forms from teaching activities, to political struggle, to armed conflict. In this sense, advocates of the spiritualist approach are not incorrect to stress their understanding of jihad as more fundamental to Islam. However, the term 'jihad', in Islamic political and historical writings, has generally carried the connotation of armed struggle—so, from the point of view of conventional usage, the other camp is also not incorrect. Over the centuries and under the custodianship of Islamic legal scholars (*ulema*), a body of jurisprudence relating to armed conflict was developed. This corpus, the *fiqh al-jihad*, shares much in common as regards both *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* with Christian and eventually secular just war theory (Kelsay 1993). Jihad, for example, is traditionally regarded as defensive in nature—that is, force is to be used only when Muslim countries come under external threat. This body of thought also makes an important distinction between combatants and non-combatants, and teaches against the disproportionate use of force. In the contemporary period, several revisionist interpretations of this concept have had the effecting of unmooring jihad from its traditional formulations. During the second half of the twentieth century, figures such as Sayyid Qutb, Muhammad Faraj, and Abdullah Azzam systematically dismantled or radically reinterpreted the classical doctrine of jihad—including, for example, the provision stating that a legitimate war can be declared only by the proper political authorities. Arguing that, in the contemporary world, even nominally Muslim rulers had abandoned the true path of Islam, their collective efforts sought to refigure jihad as an individual duty incumbent on every Muslim. While only marginally

influential in the Muslim mainstream, such thinking strongly informed the global jihadist movement, and groups such as Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda and later ISIS. This call to jihad found particular resonance in the context of various geopolitical events, such as the failure of Arab national armies in the 1967 war with Israel, Anwar Sadat's 1979 peace treaty with Tel Aviv, and the aftermath of the Afghan mujahedin's victory against the Soviet Union.

Finally, the concept of the *umma*, or community of believers (potentially global in scope), has been part of the Islamic political lexicon since the time of the Prophet. As we will see in this chapter, modern political actors have sought to mobilize Muslims around the notion of the *umma* in response to circumstances ranging from European imperialism in the late nineteenth century to US foreign policy in the contemporary period. In practice, being part of the Muslim *umma* has not generally excluded or been viewed as incompatible with membership in other orders or modes of social affiliation, such as tribe or nation. In this sense, the *umma* should not be seen as part of a rigid hierarchy of identities so much as a general sense of belonging to a geographically broad and culturally diverse faith tradition. In recent years, some observers have speculated that the prevalence of information and communication technologies, and the heightened transnational networking associated with globalization, could give Muslims a renewed sense of *umma* consciousness (Mandaville 2001).

Pan-Islam, colonialism, and the modern state

The Ottoman Empire (1300–1922), pre-eminent among modern Muslim polities, was well integrated into the international system, participating in a complex system of alliances with European powers. By the late nineteenth century, Islam had emerged as a focal point of anti-colonial agitation in the Middle East and elsewhere. The pan-Islam movement of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–97) identified European imperialism as an experience common to Muslims, from Africa across to South-East Asia, seeking to mobilize anti-colonial sentiment around a renewed sense of *umma* consciousness (Landau 1990). As an itinerant political activist who made frequent use of new transnational media—in his case, mass-circulation newspapers and pamphlets printed in France for distribution in the Middle East—Afghani's work prefigures the transnational advocacy networks of today (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Although he built a following of influential figures in locales as diverse as Afghanistan, India, Egypt, Iran, and Turkey, Afghani's pan-Islam project never evolved into a mass political movement. Its appeal was limited in part by the difficulty that Muslims faced in 'imagining' themselves as part of a community so abstract and diffuse as the *umma* (Anderson 1991a). Nationalism, by contrast, with its concrete moorings in local territory, language, history, and experience, proved a far more effective discourse in which to house projects of anti-colonial resistance. By the time of Woodrow Wilson's articulation of the doctrine of national self-determination in the aftermath of the First World War, nationalism had become a leading aspiration for most Muslims. The break-up of the Ottoman Empire, which had entered the war on the side of Germany and the central powers, led to the eventual creation of several new nation states in the Middle East, among them Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan.

That is not to say that Islam immediately disappeared from the scene with the fall of the Ottoman Empire. With the founding of the modern Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal (later known as Atatürk), a leading modernist reformer, formally dissolved the institution of the

progressive end of the spectrum, by contrast, the Islamic green (pro-ecology) movement has used the same logic to argue that humankind—as the custodian of divine creation—has a responsibility to protect the environment. Once again, a survey of the historical record reveals that the theory and practice of territorial sovereignty has had a rich tradition in the Muslim world. This latter point also brings into question the dichotomous world view that some observers ascribe to Islam. It is often said that, according to Islam, the world is divided into two realms, *dar al-Islam* (the domain of Islam) and *dar al-harb* (the domain of war). The former is taken to refer to those lands under the control of a Muslim ruler (and in which, in theory, Islamic law prevails); the latter, to all lands outside Muslim rule and with which Muslims are potentially in conflict. Such a selective and de-contextualized reading leaves one with the impression that Islam considers itself to be at war with any non-Muslim country, and ignores the existence of a wide range of additional categories—such as *dar al-ahd* or *dar al-sulh* (the domain of treaty)—that Muslim political theorists have used at various times to characterize the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim sovereign lands. Of overwhelming importance, as James Piscatori (1986: 145) has argued, 'is the consensus that has evolved over the centuries that Islam tolerates, even endorses, territorial pluralism'.

Given the centrality of war and armed conflict to international relations, it is also important here to consider briefly the notion and role of jihad in Islam. This polysemic concept has been a source of considerable confusion in recent years, with some writers arguing that the term's primary meaning is martial in nature, while others focus on its spiritual dimensions. One thing that can be said for certain is that the translation of *jihad* as 'holy war' is misleading in its characterization. The Arabic root of the term refers generically to the idea of 'struggle', and early Islamic sources draw a distinction between greater and lesser jihad. The former is regarded as an individual's inner struggle to live in accordance with the precepts of Islam, while the latter refers to the outward exertion of efforts to bring the surrounding society into compliance with Islam. This can take a range of forms from teaching activities, to political struggle, to armed conflict. In this sense, advocates of the spiritualist approach are not incorrect to stress their understanding of jihad as more fundamental to Islam. However, the term 'jihad', in Islamic political and historical writings, has generally carried the connotation of armed struggle—so, from the point of view of conventional usage, the other camp is also not incorrect. Over the centuries and under the custodianship of Islamic legal scholars (*ulema*), a body of jurisprudence relating to armed conflict was developed. This corpus, the *fiqh al-jihad*, shares much in common as regards both *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* with Christian and eventually secular just war theory (Kelsay 1993). Jihad, for example, is traditionally regarded as defensive in nature—that is, force is to be used only when Muslim countries come under external threat. This body of thought also makes an important distinction between combatants and non-combatants, and teaches against the disproportionate use of force. In the contemporary period, several revisionist interpretations of this concept have had the effecting of unmooring jihad from its traditional formulations. During the second half of the twentieth century, figures such as Sayyid Qutb, Muhammad Faraj, and Abdullah Azzam systematically dismantled or radically reinterpreted the classical doctrine of jihad—including, for example, the provision stating that a legitimate war can be declared only by the proper political authorities. Arguing that, in the contemporary world, even nominally Muslim rulers had abandoned the true path of Islam, their collective efforts sought to refigure jihad as an individual duty incumbent on every Muslim. While only marginally

influential in the Muslim mainstream, such thinking strongly informed the global jihadist movement, and groups such as Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda and later ISIS. This call to jihad found particular resonance in the context of various geopolitical events, such as the failure of Arab national armies in the 1967 war with Israel, Anwar Sadat's 1979 peace treaty with Tel Aviv, and the aftermath of the Afghan mujahedin's victory against the Soviet Union.

Finally, the concept of the *umma*, or community of believers (potentially global in scope), has been part of the Islamic political lexicon since the time of the Prophet. As we will see in this chapter, modern political actors have sought to mobilize Muslims around the notion of the *umma* in response to circumstances ranging from European imperialism in the late nineteenth century to US foreign policy in the contemporary period. In practice, being part of the Muslim *umma* has not generally excluded or been viewed as incompatible with membership in other orders or modes of social affiliation, such as tribe or nation. In this sense, the *umma* should not be seen as part of a rigid hierarchy of identities so much as a general sense of belonging to a geographically broad and culturally diverse faith tradition. In recent years, some observers have speculated that the prevalence of information and communication technologies, and the heightened transnational networking associated with globalization, could give Muslims a renewed sense of *umma* consciousness (Mandaville 2001).

Pan-Islam, colonialism, and the modern state

The Ottoman Empire (1300–1922), pre-eminent among modern Muslim polities, was well integrated into the international system, participating in a complex system of alliances with European powers. By the late nineteenth century, Islam had emerged as a focal point of anti-colonial agitation in the Middle East and elsewhere. The pan-Islam movement of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–97) identified European imperialism as an experience common to Muslims, from Africa across to South-East Asia, seeking to mobilize anti-colonial sentiment around a renewed sense of *umma* consciousness (Landau 1990). As an itinerant political activist who made frequent use of new transnational media—in his case, mass-circulation newspapers and pamphlets printed in France for distribution in the Middle East—Afghani's work prefigures the transnational advocacy networks of today (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Although he built a following of influential figures in locales as diverse as Afghanistan, India, Egypt, Iran, and Turkey, Afghani's pan-Islam project never evolved into a mass political movement. Its appeal was limited in part by the difficulty that Muslims faced in 'imagining' themselves as part of a community so abstract and diffuse as the *umma* (Anderson 1991a). Nationalism, by contrast, with its concrete moorings in local territory, language, history, and experience, proved a far more effective discourse in which to house projects of anti-colonial resistance. By the time of Woodrow Wilson's articulation of the doctrine of national self-determination in the aftermath of the First World War, nationalism had become a leading aspiration for most Muslims. The break-up of the Ottoman Empire, which had entered the war on the side of Germany and the central powers, led to the eventual creation of several new nation states in the Middle East, among them Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan.

That is not to say that Islam immediately disappeared from the scene with the fall of the Ottoman Empire. With the founding of the modern Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal (later known as Atatürk), a leading modernist reformer, formally dissolved the institution of the

Caliphate in 1924. For some leading religious scholars of the time, this act prompted a crisis of Islamic political theory. Some, such as the Egyptian Ali Abd al-Raziq (1888–1966), saw Islam and the modern nation state as perfectly compatible, arguing that, in relation to questions of governance, Islam did not prescribe any particular institutional arrangements (Abd al-Raziq 1925). Even those who regarded the Caliphate as a necessity, such as Rashid Rida (1865–1935), eventually recognized that, with the recent shift in world order, a revival of the Caliphate was not a realistic prospect—arguing instead that Muslims should focus on realizing the moral system of Islam within the confines of the nation state (Rida 1923). In this last regard, his thinking informed in important ways the intellectuals and activists who founded the modern Islamist movement. These theoretical deliberations also had a more practical manifestation in various abortive attempts to institutionalize a system of international Islamic congresses in Egypt during the inter-war years (Kramer 1986). Since this time, the idea of political mobilization in the name of the *umma* has generally been found only in the programme of certain radical Islamist movements such as the Caliphate-oriented Hizb ut-Tahrir, or the self-declared Islamic State (ISIS) movement that announced the re-establishment of the Caliphate in 2014 in territories it had seized in Syria and Iraq. While the majority of Muslims around the world today give little credence to the idea of a renewed Caliphate, the *umma* as an ideal has continued to serve an important symbolic function as an expression of the aspiration to greater global unity among Muslims.

The period following the World Wars saw an unprecedented expansion of the international system as dozens of former European colonies in Africa and Asia emerged as independent nation states. This process also dramatically transformed the political geography of the Middle East. Numerous countries, such as Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Syria, emerged out of the rubble of the Ottoman Empire, with several others in North Africa, such as Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria—the latter only after a bitter war with France—gaining their independence from former European colonial powers. Saudi Arabia was a newcomer, while others, notably Iran, had avoided ever becoming formally part of the European imperial system. Egypt and Saudi Arabia represent two particularly useful cases for exploring the relationship between Islam and the establishment of modern nation states in the Middle East.

Egypt, whose independence from Britain was consolidated in the wake of the 1952 Free Officer's Revolution that brought Gamal Abd al-Nasser to power, represents the prototypical national-secular republic in the Arab world. Nasser emerged over the course of the 1950s as the leading exponent of Arab nationalism, developing a devoted following across the Middle East and eventually even a global role as a leading figure within the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War. As an ideology, Arab nationalism—or 'pan-Arabism' as it is sometimes known—emphasized the historical and cultural affinity of all Arabic-speaking peoples. As a political project, it reached its apogee with the short-lived union of Egypt and Syria as the United Arabic Republic (1958–61). As the leading symbol of Arab nationalism, Egypt often found itself in conflict with other emerging regional powers, such as Saudi Arabia—a country that sought, by contrast, to emphasize its Islamic identity. Egypt was also the setting for the founding in 1928 of the Muslim Brotherhood, the prototype for virtually all modern Islamist movements. The Brotherhood has evolved considerably over the course of its lifetime, experiencing periods of both political quietism and radical militancy—the latter associated, in particular, with the intellectual leadership of Sayyid Qutb

in the 1960s. Consistently present in the Muslim Brotherhood political discourse, however, has been a critique of national-secularism. Convinced that the newly independent Egypt, particularly under the Nasserists, was under threat of losing its Islamic identity through excessive Westernization, the Brotherhood proposed an alternative ideology in which Islam systematically pervades all aspects of life, including public administration and affairs of state. The movement's concrete goals included the creation of an Islamic state and—rejecting the legitimacy of human legislation outside the remit of religion—a legal system based exclusively on Islamic law (sharia). Also implied here is the priority, in global terms, of Islamic causes over the interests and policies of nation-state governments. Hence, in 1948, against the wishes of the Egyptian state, the Muslim Brotherhood sent volunteer fighters to Palestine. While most commonly associated with its original incarnation in Egypt, at the core of the Muslim Brotherhood movement is a broad ideology that went on to inspire the founding not only of Brotherhood branches throughout the Arab world, but also related movements in countries such as Pakistan, Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Mandaville 2007). This same ideology has undergone important shifts over the years, adapting itself to the differing political environments of specific national settings. For example, Hamas was originally founded out of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, but has evolved into what is today primarily an Islamic-based movement for Palestinian national liberation. Elsewhere, the ideas of Muslim Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna had a strong influence on Abul Ala Maududi, chief ideologue of the Jamaat-i-Islami, Pakistan's leading Islamist party. Prior to the establishment of Pakistan at the time of Indian Partition in 1947, Maududi was strongly opposed to nationalism, seeing in it a doctrine that contradicted the universalism of Islam.

Saudi Arabia represents another important context in which to explore the interface of Islam, politics, and international relations. Emerging as a sovereign nation in 1932, the political system of Saudi Arabia was predicated on an alliance between a leading tribal family, the al-Saud, and a group of Islamic scholars who lent religious legitimacy to the former's efforts at unifying diverse tribal regions into a single polity. At the kingdom's founding, it was declared to be an Islamic state, with the sharia as its highest law. The enormous oil reserves found within its territory soon vaulted Saudi Arabia onto the world stage, with the US cultivating a particularly close relationship with the kingdom after the Second World War. Over the next several decades, Saudi Arabia would seek to assert itself as a leader of the Muslim world, not only because of its geopolitical clout, but also because of the presence on its borders of Islam's two holiest cities, Mecca and Medina, the setting for the annual hajj pilgrimage that constitutes one of the core tenets of the Muslim faith. The kingdom has, at times, also sought to represent and exert Islamic values in international and intergovernmental forums (see **Box 8.1**). During the Cold War, Saudi Arabia's ambitions in this regard, not to mention its close relationship with the US, would bring it into conflict with Egypt under Nasser (particularly during the height of the latter's dalliance with the Soviet Union) and with Iran in the wake of that country's Islamic Revolution in 1979. Windfall revenues accruing from heightened oil prices in the 1970s allowed the kingdom to propagate its particular interpretation of Islam, known as Wahhabism, through a wide range of surrogate organizations and charitable organizations. This 'petro-Islam', as it came to be known, subsequently had an important impact on political and conflict dynamics in a wide range of global settings.

Box 8.1 Saudi Arabia and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Brought before the General Assembly of the United Nations in late 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was passed by a vote of forty-eight countries in favour, zero opposed, and eight abstentions. Among the latter was the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, whose delegation felt that several provisions of the UDHR were not in keeping with sharia law and with the kingdom's identity as an Islamic state. Among these were Article 16, guaranteeing equal marriage rights for men and women, and, more particularly, Article 18, which endorses an individual's right to change his or her religion. The austere form of Islam practised in Saudi Arabia views apostasy from the faith as a crime. These views and religious interpretations, however, were not in keeping with majority opinion among Muslim nations, most of which—including other Islamic states such as Pakistan—have adopted the UDHR.

Saudi Arabia, we should note, is not alone in styling itself as an Islamic state. While several other countries in the contemporary world make similar claims—notably Sudan, Afghanistan under the Taliban, and, more recently, the self-styled Islamic State in Syria and Iraq—two, Pakistan and Iran, are of particular importance and make for interesting points of contrast with Saudi Arabia.

Pakistan was founded as a homeland for Muslims of the Indian subcontinent, and while its constitution declares it to be an 'Islamic republic', the exact relationship between Islam and the state in Pakistan has been a matter of considerable political debate over the course of that country's history. Some, such as Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, saw Muslims as constituting a nation and sought accordingly to establish a largely secular framework in which they could achieve political independence. Islamists led by Maududi and the Jamaat-i-Islami, by contrast, emphasized the idea that Islam should constitute the ideology of the Pakistani state, arguing for a constitution that would privilege sharia law.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, by contrast, represented the first time that an Islamic state had been created through a popular revolution. Riding a wave of widespread discontent with the ruling Pahlavi aristocracy, the Iranian clergy, led by the charismatic Ayatollah Khomeini, seized power in 1979 through an alliance with disparate political factions, including liberals and communists, and then proceeded to consolidate power by oppressing anyone who opposed their conservative brand of Islamic rule.

The Iranian model is distinctive in a number of regards, not least of all because it represents the only Islamic state in which religious scholars are in direct control of all major government functions. This model is derived from Khomeini's doctrine of *vilayat-i faqih* ('guardianship of the jurisconsultant'), which states that political power should rest in the hands of those possessing the most superior understanding of Islamic law. In the Iranian system, the preponderance of power resides with the figure of the Supreme Leader, who controls the judiciary, the military and police, and the media. While there is no requirement that the president of the Republic be a religious scholar, the functional power of this position is limited. In the realm of international relations, the president is invested with the capacity to negotiate and conclude treaties with other countries, but all matters of security—as well as the 'delineation of the general policies of the Islamic Republic'—ultimately fall to the Supreme Leader. Partly stemming from its rivalry with Saudi Arabia for leadership of the Muslim world, Iran—one of only very few countries whose population is predominantly (in this case, 90 per cent) Shia as opposed to Sunni Muslim—has at times sought to emphasize

that, as an Islamic Republic, it operates differently from nation states founded on the Western model. In terms of its conduct in world politics, however, Iran has tended to participate in all of the standard practices and to express many of the norms associated with modern international relations, including membership in major international organizations, treaties, and global legal regimes.

The political economy of Islamic revival

Contemporary 'Islamic Revival' in the Middle East is commonly dated to the period following the 1967 Six-Day War, in which the dismal performance of Arab militaries and Israel's success in capturing Jerusalem revealed the failure of the national-secular model. While the symbolic power of such moments should never be underestimated, a more thorough understanding of Islam's renewed political significance can be achieved by situating the political mobilization of Islamic language and symbols within the political economies of Middle Eastern states, and, from the early 1970s, against the backdrop of rapidly accelerating globalization processes. Indeed, the very notion of an Islamic 'revival' obscures the fact that the cultural resonance and everyday language of religion had always been present in the political discourse of the region.

While our primary focus here is on the growth of Islamist social and political movements, it is important to recognize that such groups have not been the only significant Islamic actors; Middle Eastern states themselves have sought to intervene in the religious field, shaping societal understandings of Islam and deploying religious institutions in pursuit of their own goals. In Turkey, for example, the Kemalist ideology of the ruling elite has sought to circumscribe the practice of religion within very narrow, officially approved boundaries. The government's directorate of religious affairs—or Diyanet, as it is known—controls all mosques in the country and oversees the provision of religious services. In Egypt, the Nasserists brought the institutions of Al-Azhar University, for centuries the pre-eminent world centre of Islamic knowledge production in the Sunni tradition, into the remit of governmental bureaucracy—ensuring that the religious scholars (*ulema*) and their mosques would not function as spaces of public critique. Furthermore, they sought to promote an understanding of Islam that was in keeping with the government's own priorities for Egyptian national development (Starrett 1998).

When it comes to Islamism, it is important to note that the ideology of Hassan al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood has always been primarily a middle-class phenomenon. As a distinctly modern and 'systematized' reform project, it was designed specifically to appeal to the sensibilities and aspirations of the Middle East's newly educated middle classes. Islamists found early success by figuring themselves as the cultural buffer to rapid modernization, ensuring that Islam remained central to Arab identity and society. As it became clear, particularly from the 1960s, that modernization under the stewardship of national-secular elites would not translate into continued upward social mobility, urban Arab middle classes—now untethered from community safety nets and traditional patronage structures—began to look for alternative answers. Mobilizing behind the slogan *al-islam huwa al-hal* ('Islam is the solution'), the Muslim Brotherhood seized the opportunity presented by this increasingly prevalent sense of relative deprivation to leverage their programme into a mass social

movement. Perceiving the Islamists as a growing threat, the Egyptian government cracked down on the Muslim Brotherhood from the 1950s, banning the group and jailing a number of its leaders. This period of oppression coincides with the Brotherhood's most militant phase. Its chief ideologue, Sayyid Qutb, had become convinced that direct armed confrontation with the state was the only way in which to address what he saw as Arab society's descent—at the hands of pro-Western authoritarian regimes—into a state of *jahiliyyah* (pre-Islamic ignorance). In this regard, his famous treatise *Milestones*, authored while in prison (Qutb was executed by the regime in 1966), can be read as a critique of post-colonial development. As some analysts have noted, however, it would be wrong simply to reduce the phenomenon of political Islam to the class interests of a particular actor (Bayat 2007). Islam as a discourse of transformative social change in the face of modernity goes back to the late eighteenth century and cannot be regarded exclusively as a superstructural effect of contemporary economic development.

The impact of globalization on states in the Middle East is also important to consider in relation to the growing efficacy of political Islam from the 1970s. During this period, Nasser's successor in Egypt, Anwar Sadat, shifted his country's geopolitical orientation towards the West. Egypt's 'open door' (*infitah*) policy was designed to encourage foreign direct investment in the country and to integrate Egypt into the emerging structures of a globalized economy. Sadat, who sought in distinct contrast to Nasser to figure himself as the 'believer president', rehabilitated the Muslim Brotherhood as a social and religious organization (but kept in place the ban on its political activities), in the hope that the Islamists could serve to counterbalance the political left. Those within the Brotherhood still beholden to the ideas of Sayyid Qutb saw the decision by the movement's mainstream leadership to renounce violence and operate within parameters prescribed by the government as a form of co-option. The 1970s saw several militant groups splinter off from the main Brotherhood organization, some of whom would later become part of the global jihad movement and join forces with Al-Qaeda. For these groups, Sadat's ultimate betrayal came in 1979, when he signed a peace agreement with Israel, leading a faction of the Islamic jihad to assassinate him 1981.

Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, pushed Egypt's integration with the West and global capitalism to new heights. With hindsight, it can be said that Egypt's decision to open itself up to external economic forces and increased liberalization ended up creating a political environment highly conducive to the growth of Islamism. Mubarak took Egypt into an International Monetary Fund (IMF)-mandated structural adjustment programme that subjected the country's economy to a number of sudden shocks. The scaling back of the government sector, for example, led to a major reduction in employment opportunities and less provision of social services. The Muslim Brotherhood flooded into the vacuum created by the 'retreat' of the Egyptian state. Through the creation of a vast network of charities and social organizations—in effect, an alternative infrastructure for the delivery of basic services—the Islamists showed themselves capable of outperforming the state. The Brotherhood increasingly colonized civil society spaces in Egypt, capturing control, for example, of all major professional syndicates. While generally banned from participating as a political party, the Islamists nevertheless wielded significant clout through the many influential social nodes that lay within their sphere of influence. At the height of the Islamists' social influence, it was even possible to speak of a separate 'Islamic economy' run through a number of Islamic investment companies—most of which were insoluble and later collapsed. Meanwhile, the

Egyptian government continued, through the 1980s and 1990s, to contend with the violent tactics of the radical Islamist splinter groups.

Egypt's experience with Islamism was by no means unique. In Algeria, for example, a similar socio-economic situation—which here also mapped onto a pre-existing cleavage between the Western-oriented Francophone urban elite and an emerging middle class that tended to be more Arab in terms of its cultural and linguistic identity, and also more religiously observant—led to the rapid emergence in the early 1990s of the *Front Islamique du Salut*. The FIS was poised to win national elections and to take power in 1991 when the Algerian military stepped in to annul the vote, precipitating what amounted to a civil war that would run throughout much of the decade.

Islam and geopolitics

Running in parallel with these global–domestic dynamics was an increasingly prominent role for Islam in Cold War geopolitics. Fuelled by windfall revenues after the oil shock of the early 1970s, Saudi Arabia sought to consolidate its leadership of the Muslim world by significantly scaling up support for activities such as mosque-building and religious education around the globe. This 'petro-Islam' subsequently came to be synonymous with the worldwide propagation of the kingdom's austere Wahhabi brand of Islam, which often cross-fertilized with similarly conservative currents in countries such as Pakistan. In general terms, this initiative was welcomed by the US, which viewed Saudi Arabia's religious outreach as a potential check on the growth of (atheist) communism. The Saudi royal family possessed sufficient political and economic capital to paper over the initial signs of a significant undercurrent of Islamist dissent within the heart of the kingdom itself. This manifested itself in the dramatic siege on Mecca's Grand Mosque in 1979, an event that severely embarrassed Saudi Arabia's own security forces when they were forced to prevail upon foreign forces to quell the uprising. The same event also foreshadowed the emergence of concerted religious opposition in Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War.

The year 1979 also saw another watershed event in the form of Iran's Islamic Revolution. Mobilizing popular discontent with the regime of Shah Reza Pahlavi, a close ally of the US, long-time political dissident Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini united a broad cross-spectrum of ideological forces to topple the royal family and to create the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iranian elite, as Khomeini put it, was suffering from a 'Westoxification' (*gharbzadegi*) that could be eliminated only by replacing the country's political system with one based on Islamic values. One particularly remarkable aspect of this revolution represented an early example of the political utility of globalized popular media. In the months leading up to the revolution, Khomeini primed his audience by smuggling sermons on audio cassettes from his headquarters outside Paris to Iran, where they were duplicated, widely distributed, and eagerly consumed by shopkeepers, taxi drivers, and in private homes (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi 1994). Once the revolution had taken place, however, it soon became clear that what Khomeini had in mind was something different from the open and accountable democracy for which most Iranians had been hoping. Instead, Khomeini put his theoretical model of *vilayat-i faqih*—elaborated earlier in a serious of essays on Islamic governance—into practice through the implementation of direct clerical rule. Any political

opposition (even from within the ranks of the clergy) was severely repressed, as Khomeini pushed through a new constitution that enshrined him as the country's Supreme Leader—an office that afforded him direct control of the country's security forces, judiciary, and media.

Iran's Islamic Revolution also had important international repercussions. In so far as it symbolized the successful removal of a secular regime by Islamic forces, Khomeini became a hero to Islamists everywhere—even those of a Sunni persuasion. At a time when the leaders of Saudi Arabia were vulnerable to accusations of collusion with the West, the Islamic Revolution allowed Iran to vault itself into direct competition with the Saudis—and, to some extent, with Zia ul-Haq's Pakistan—for the mantle of Muslim leadership. Over the next decades, Riyadh and Tehran would frequently find themselves engaged in a game of 'holier than thou', with each trying to outdo the other in support of global Islamic causes such as Palestine. Khomeini's fatwa against the British author Salman Rushdie in 1988 can be partly understood in this light. Tehran also began to cultivate its own clients and proxy groups overseas, including significant financial and material support for the Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah. It is also interesting to note that Iran's revolution had a significant impact even beyond the Muslim world. Khomeini's project had broader 'Third World-ist' appeal, and was viewed in parts of Africa and Asia as a triumph for the developing world that transcended the religion dimension. By appearing to carve a geopolitical pathway autonomous of both the US and the Soviet Union, Iran also seemed to embody the aspirations of the Non-Aligned Movement (Esposito 1990). This aspect of the revolution has even resurfaced in the first decade of the twenty-first century, with Iran reaching out to partners in Latin America and Africa in an effort to form a coalition of emerging powers critical of US hegemony. Closer to home, the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution seemed less inspiring. Khomeini soon sought to distract discontent with his revolution on the home front by focusing on a new national cause in the form of the 1980–88 war with neighbouring Iraq—a situation rendered even more complicated by the fact that, like Iran, the majority of Iraq's population was Shi'i Muslim.

Roughly coterminous with the Islamic Revolution and the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq War, the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan provided yet another opportunity for Islam to become implicated in Cold War international relations. Although it occurred beyond the geographic scope of the Middle East, the struggle of the Afghan mujahedin against the Soviets was intimately tied to political dynamics in the region. Afghan fighters received important financial and material support from the US and Saudi Arabia, often using Pakistan's security services as intermediary. More important to the long term, however, was the flow of volunteer fighters (generally estimated to have numbered in the tens of thousands) from the Arab world—'Arab Afghans' as they came to be known—who flocked to Afghanistan and Pakistan in response to calls for jihad from radical Islamic leaders such as the Palestinian Abdullah Azzam. Azzam, who would prove highly influential in shaping the world view of a young Osama bin Laden, was instrumental in building the religious justification for Muslims to leave their countries of citizenship and to fight abroad in the name of Islamic causes (Gerges 2005). Despite their overwhelming numbers and technological superiority, the Soviets did not manage to defeat the mujahedin and their withdrawal in 1988 after eight years was widely perceived as a victory for the Afghan resistance. For those jihadists harbouring global aspirations, Afghanistan was seen as evidence that it was indeed possible to subdue a world superpower under the banner of Islam. Many went on to join Islamic causes elsewhere, such

as in Kashmir or Bosnia, while others returned to the Middle East to continue their battle with local regimes in countries such as Algeria and Egypt. It was in this crucible that Osama bin Laden, a young Saudi from a prominent commercial family who had found his calling in the Afghan jihad, decided to establish an organizational infrastructure to support the conduct of global jihad. Thus, out of a nucleus of Arab-Afghans whose efforts had been at least indirectly supported by (and were strategically in line with) the United States, Al-Qaeda was established in 1988. Over the next decade, bin Laden's group built a shadowy network of operatives and finances that spanned much of the Middle East and beyond, culminating in a series of attacks in New York City and Washington on 11 September 2001 ('9/11') that would have major repercussions not only on international relations in the Middle East, but on th global order more generally. The increased human mobility and communications infrastructure associated with globalization (see **'Islam, globalization, and the Arab Spring'** later in this chapter) were central to the mobilization capacity found in these and other Islamist groups.

Thinking about Islam and foreign policy

Thus far we have explored topics such as Islamic thinking on the nation state, and the impact of Islamist groups and the governments of 'Islamic states' on various domestic and geopolitical dynamics. But how should we understand the relationship between Islam and the behaviour of various international relations actors? How is it possible to know when Islam plays a role in the decision calculus of foreign policymakers? Likewise, by what criteria might we decide that the content of a particular policy choice is 'Islamic'? In approaching these questions, one obviously wants to find a middle way between those approaches—often described as 'orientalist'—that explain all Muslim behaviour (social, cultural, economic, political) by reference to Islam and, on the other extreme of the spectrum, purely instrumentalist approaches that view Islam as representing nothing more than a form of rhetoric used to justify policies the real motivation of which lies elsewhere.

It is, of course, impossible for us ever to claim that we can discern the true intention, motivation, or meaning behind a particular social or political action. This does not mean, however, that, when it comes to so pervasive and deeply inscribed a source of social meaning as Islam, we cannot attempt to account for the role of Islamic norms and symbols in a given political situation. Thus we must broadly concur with Adeed Dawisha when he writes:

> It is simply taken for granted that, notwithstanding the variety of interpretations, there still exists an ideological force called Islam that has a symbolic value, ranging from nebulous to significant among people who call themselves Muslims. If this is true, then one should expect that in the actual making of foreign policy, decision-makers of countries, a substantial part of whose population is Muslim, must take Islam into consideration when formulating their policies. At this level of analysis, therefore, one can legitimately assume that Islam must constitute a part (how significant a part is another matter) of the images and perceptions, even attitudes and value-systems, of decision-makers. However, this does not explain how relevant Islam is to particular policies, for to identify factors is not to trace their influence. To uncover processes that affect external behaviour is not to explain how and why they are operative under certain circumstances and not under others.
>
> (Dawisha 1983: 5)

Theories of international relations have traditionally struggled to take culture and identity into account. Privileging the (objectively defined) national interests of a given state, conceptual traditions such as realism, for example, have tended to find little relevance for religion in their explanatory schemas. More recently, theories such as constructivism have sought to appreciate the inter-subjectively defined meanings through which international political actors define and make sense of the situations in which they find themselves (Wendt 1992). Such approaches, however, can often lead to culture or identity functioning as little more than an 'independent variable'—a methodological position that still posits that somehow the 'Islamic factor' in a given situation can be discerned, defined, and isolated relevant to other factors:

> The effort to isolate Islam from other values and to determine its precise (or at least probable) functional role is usually undertaken by reference to the articulated images of the decision-makers. But this immediately raises a further problem ... with a little interpretation nearly anything can be justified through reference to Islam, and as such its power to explain and unravel ambiguities can be questioned.
>
> (Dawisha 1983: 6)

When it comes to Islam and international relations, therefore, our task cannot be one of trying to identify definitive causal relationships between religious faith or normativity, and particular political behaviours. Rather, embracing the 'Muslim politics' approach outlined by Eickelman and Piscatori (1996), we should seek to understand how language, symbols, and values associated with Islam come to be implicated in the representation and deliberation of world political issues, not only by state policymakers, but also, and especially today, by an increasingly diverse range of social actors.

This does not mean that we cannot essay some judgement as to when, for example, the invocation of Islam by political elites leans towards something that looks like the instrumentalization of religion. It has not been uncommon for political leaders associated with strongly national-secular, and even leftist, ideologies to garb themselves in religion during times of crisis, or when their reputations are suffering. Iraq's Saddam Hussein, for example, sought to rally his nation during the long war with Iran (1980–88) by figuring it as, in part, a struggle against the heterodoxy of Shi'ism. Likewise, in the run-up to the Gulf War of 1991, Iraq's conflict with the US was described through the concept of jihad. In television interviews around this time, Saddam would make a point of breaking off the conversation in order to pray. Such public performances of piety by struggling leaders are not uncommon, with the state media often mobilized to provide comprehensive coverage of, for example, a Middle Eastern leader's journey to Mecca and Medina to perform hajj. For Nasser, Islam was not always an obstacle to the realization of Arab nationalism, but rather could often be woven into the broader narrative of Arab identity. Indeed, Islam has often functioned not in opposition to, but as a form of, national cohesion. Also relevant here is the use of religious scholars (*ulema*) by the state to provide religious justification for particular courses of action (Alianak 2007). Thus we saw Saudi Arabia seeking a warrant from its religious establishment for the controversial stationing on the kingdom's soil of hundreds of thousands of non-Muslim soldiers in the run-up to the Gulf War of 1991. Similarly, the Egyptian state's control of Al-Azhar University (the Grand Sheikh of which is technically a high-ranking civil servant) has meant that the institution can be

counted on to buttress the positions of Hosni Mubarak's government. More recently, in the case of the Danish cartoon affair of 2006, we saw certain governments in the region taking seemingly counter-intuitive positions. Syria, for example, whose secular Baathist government rarely rallies around religion, saw fit to allow protests against the cartoons to be held in major cities—seemingly to turn to the attention of Syrians away from a variety of domestic ills.

Islam also has an institutional identity in international relations beyond the policies and actions of individual states and leaders. Of primary importance here is the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), an intergovernmental forum composed of Muslim-majority countries (and several with significant Muslim minorities) founded in 1969 to represent and advocate for Islamic issues before the international community. With international relations dominated by the pursuit of national interests, it is not surprising to find that, over the course of its history, the OIC has often struggled to reconcile the interests of its more powerful individual members (notably, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey) with the pursuit of a common Islamic position on world issues. As Murden (2002: 198) notes, the OIC has tended to be most unified—and effective—when serving to aggregate Muslim opinion on broadly agreed-upon issues that do not threaten the direct interests of a particular member state—such as expressions of generic support for Palestine, the Danish cartoon crisis (for which the OIC cleared the agenda of its 2005 summit), or the war in Bosnia, in which few OIC members had a real stake. Within the broader OIC 'family' is a range of organizations that mirror certain functional organs of the United Nations. The Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), for example, is roughly analogous to UNESCO. The Islamic Red Crescent Society is now an important partner within the worldwide Red Cross movement, and the Islamic Development Bank works alongside other multilateral donor institutions and regional development banks. Working more specifically in the realm of religion, non-governmental entities such as the Muslim World League and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth have served as important conduits for Saudi petro-Islam and transnational Islamist networking (Schulze 1990). In the humanitarian field, a number of Islamic charities and relief organizations, such as Muslim Aid and Islamic Relief, have played a prominent role in recent disasters and complex human emergencies. The influence of religion can also be seen in non-Islamic multilateral forums. For example, during the United Nations Conference on Population and Development in 2002, Saudi Arabia and the Vatican formed a coalition to oppose family planning.

Islam, globalization, and the 'Arab Spring'

Of particular importance in recent years has been a substantive increase in the extent and range of Muslim transnationalism in the Middle East—especially the growing prominence of non-governmental actors. While the region may, in some regards, appear relatively untouched by or unintegrated into many processes of economic globalization (Henry and Springborg 2001), one cannot deny that the phenomenal rise of information and communications technologies commonly associated with globalization have produced a teeming 'media-scape' in the Middle East (Appadurai 1996). Islam is very much part of this new media terrain, with some analysts linking its growth to a significant expansion and

pluralization of the 'Muslim public sphere' (Eickelman and Anderson 2003). A number of important new Islamic voices have emerged in recent years through satellite television. Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an octogenarian religious scholar from Egypt based in the Gulf sheikhdom of Qatar, became a household name through his show on Al-Jazeera television. For our purposes, Qaradawi's significance lies not so much in the mere fact of his projecting religious authority via new media, but rather in his ability, through satellite television, to bypass government-censored national media and thereby challenge the boundaries of 'official' Islam (Skovgaard-Petersen 2004). Where the scholars of Al-Azhar, for example, refrain from addressing matters of foreign policy, Qaradawi does not hesitate to hold forth on the Israel–Palestine conflict or the US war in Iraq. Qaradawi was also instrumental in advocating a Middle Eastern boycott on Danish goods in response to the 2006 cartoons featuring the Prophet Muhammad. New kinds of popular religious figure without any formal Islamic training are also leveraging new media to get into the game. Hence we see accountant-turned-television-preacher Amr Khaled calling for inter-civilizational dialogue in the wake of the Danish cartoons. The fact that the Egyptian government pressured him to leave the country in 2002 shows that states are themselves aware that they are operating in an extremely volatile environment in which individuals and groups can cultivate mass followings and accumulate social capital very quickly.

Conventional Islamist groups have also seen globalization as an opportunity to expand their international political influence. The new generation of Islamists, represented by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey, is pro-business, globally savvy, and able to build a broad electoral base through its focus on curbing corruption (here, the religious credentials are crucial) and bringing Turkey into the European Union. We see a similar approach in its namesake in Morocco, the *Partie de la justice et du développement* (PJD) and also in the Egyptian Hizb al-Wasat (Centrist Party). These new 'pragmatic' Islamists are committed to the democratic process and are generally seen to be more interested in achieving results than in towing a rigid ideological line (Nasr 2005). While the political platforms, agendas, and priorities of these parties reflect their respective national settings, there is also a sense in which they can be viewed as part of a broader, generational trend in which the Islamist project seeks to accommodate itself—often more effectively than state governments—to the phenomenon of globalization. The leaders of these parties, some of whom studied together in universities in the West, are informally networked and regularly in contact. But we should not think that Islamism is uniformly adopting the normative agenda of neoliberal globalization. For some within the Muslim Brotherhood movement, for example, globalization is primarily associated with increased socio-economic inequality around the world. These Islamists have sought to build tactical alliances with the political left in the Middle East (Schwedler and Clark 2007). Among those living in the West, this 'anti-hegemonic Islamism' has taken the form of opposition to the 2003 Iraq War, or even outreach to environmental groups and the broader global justice or anti-globalization (*altermondialisation*) movements. Iran's recent efforts to link up with partners—particularly leftists such as Venezuela's Hugo Chavez—in Latin America and elsewhere in the name of countering US hegemony are also relevant here.

The landscape of Islamic politics in the Middle East was transformed dramatically in 2011, with popular revolutions that brought down the regimes of long-standing autocrats such as Tunisia's Ben Ali, Egypt's Mubarak, and Gaddafi in Libya. Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria

also experienced transitions, protests, and civil war, respectively. Some of the region's monarchies—notably Jordan and Morocco—undertook pre-emptive reform measures to stave off pressures stemming from deeply entrenched socio-economic malaise and popular frustration at the lack of accountable and effective government. In all countries experiencing either transition or new political openings, Islamic political parties—both classic Islamists and newly enfranchised, ultra-conservative Salafis—initially achieved stunning success at the ballot box. For a short time, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and Tunisia's En-Nahda became the dominant political forces in their respective countries after years of oppression at the hands of autocratic regimes. Both parties immediately faced the challenge of transforming themselves from opposition movements into governing parties, all the while struggling to navigate the practical challenges of improving dire economic conditions, and managing the increased scrutiny and scepticism levelled at them by displaced secular forces and external actors. Both generally refrained from talking about religion or pursuing explicitly Islamist agendas in either their domestic or foreign policies.

Their political success was short-lived, however. The Muslim Brotherhood's failure to tangibly address Egypt's problems coupled with a monopolistic approach to politics led to growing unpopularity, culminating in Brotherhood president Mohamed Mursi being removed in a military coup in the summer of 2013. In the months that followed, Egypt's new military-backed government banned the Muslim Brotherhood, detained almost all of its key leaders, and employed deadly violence against supporters of the group—with the result that, only a few years after reaching historical heights of success, the Muslim Brotherhood has been all but removed from formal politics in Egypt for the foreseeable future. En-Nahda in Tunisia fared somewhat better, although it too suffered political setbacks. The party's first year in power was characterized by ongoing tensions with secular groups and a growing political impasse. En-Nahda voluntarily stepped down from power but in subsequent elections failed to regain control of the government. Unlike Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, however, En-Nahda has been able to keep its seat at the political table and has sought to normalize the presence and participation of Islamists in Tunisia's politics.

Beyond the political fortunes of Islamist parties in individual countries, Islamism turned into a regional 'wedge' issue following the 2013 coup against the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Fearing the rising influence of Islamists, several countries—notably Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates—joined forces in an effort to check the political influence of the Muslim Brotherhood across the region. They sought to brand the Muslim Brotherhood as a form of terrorism and to liken the group to Hamas, Al-Qaeda, and ISIS. On the other side of this divide was an axis formed by two countries, Turkey and Qatar, who had continued to support Islamists across the region. Tensions between the two camps severely frayed relations within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a forum generally characterized by consensus and unaccustomed to open disputes between its members.

The 2003 Iraq War and Arab Spring of 2011 have both also had a significant effect on Muslim transnationalism in the region. Some authors, such as Vali Nasr (2006), have spoken of a 'Shia Revival' marked by an upsurge in sectarian political mobilization following the Iraq War. The war undoubtedly provided Iran with new opportunities to wield geopolitical influence in the region and beyond. The popular uprising across the Arab world in 2011 threw these same issues into even starker relief, with countries ruled by minority sectarian groups—particularly Syria and Bahrain—experiencing high levels of tension and violence,

and Iran using the opportunity to exert pressure in key countries. The Houthi Rebellion in Yemen, for example, saw Shi'i rebels backed by Tehran emerge as a major political and military force in Yemen. The global jihadist movement, increasingly fragmented post-9/11, was able to some limited extent to use the widespread unpopularity of the Iraq War to reconstitute its ranks and regional networks. The peaceful, cross-ideological Arab uprisings of 2011, however, severely discredited their claim that political change in the region could come about only through the combination of Islam and violence. With the death of Osama bin Laden at the hands of the US military that same year, the global jihadist movement also suffered an important symbolic blow. The volatility of the region in recent years has, however, allowed those Islamists operating in situations of conflict or weak and failed states, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, to become more assertive. Both have enjoyed considerable electoral success and renewed popular legitimacy as symbols of resistance against external influence, even as they continue to be regarded with considerable scepticism by the West.

The most dramatic manifestation of Islamist militancy to emerge from these developments is the movement known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS), or simply the Islamic State (IS). ISIS is a successor to Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which was mostly eradicated by combined US and Iraqi military efforts in 2007. The movement re-emerged out of the turmoil of Syria's civil war after 2011, taking and holding significant amounts of territory. In 2014, it swept across the border of Iraq and, taking advantage of festering sectarian grievances in that country, dramatically seized the city of Mosul and established itself as a major political and military force in the northern and central regions. Shortly thereafter, ISIS declared that it had re-established the Caliphate and would be known as the Islamic State (see Box 8.2). ISIS became notorious for committing extreme acts of violence against those it

Box 8.2 Is the 'Islamic State' a state?

When Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the emir of the so-called Islamic State (IS), claimed the mantle of the Caliphate in 2014, he sought to create a sense of legitimacy for his quasi-state by linking it to a centuries old institution in Islamic political history. To what extent, however, can the Islamic State be considered a sovereign entity according to the conventional norms of international relations? In the early months of its existence, the Islamic State managed to accrue certain trappings of *internal sovereignty*—namely, it exercised a near monopoly of violence, rule of law, and governance over populations in the territories it held. It also managed to generate sufficient financial revenue to sustain these activities for a time. However, many who reside in areas controlled by IS do not regard it as a legitimate political force and cooperate with the movement mainly out of fear, or because they perceive some longer term political benefit after IS collapses or is defeated. Moreover, within half a year of establishing its new Caliphate, the capacity of IS to effectively govern its territories had begun to deteriorate. The Islamic State is especially weak when it comes to *external sovereignty*, that dimension of sovereignty that derives from one's standing within the broader international society of nation states. No other member of the international community has recognized the Islamic State's claim of sovereignty, rendering it impossible for the group to participate in conventional international relations. In declaring a new Caliphate, IS was appealing first and foremost to Muslims around the world. However, with only a few exceptions among certain fringe radical figures, no significant Muslim religious or political leaders have recognized IS and most Muslims around the world have expressed little interest in a new Caliphate. In late 2014, a group of more than one hundred of the Muslim world's most important religious scholars wrote an open letter to the Islamic State explaining that it and its activities have no legitimate basis in Islamic law.

defined as its enemies, including Shia, Sunnis who opposed their vision of Islam, and various non-Muslim religious communities in Iraq. Stunned by the scale and gratuitous nature of this violence, a regional and international coalition, led by the United States, was formed in 2014 to attempt to counter and destroy ISIS. In 2015, IS-inspired attacks in Paris and the downing of a Russian passenger jet over Egypt by suspected Islamic militants led to an increased international commitment to undermine the group's activities including Russian air strikes.

Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, Islam has figured in the foreign policies and positions of states in the Middle East in a variety of ways. In concluding, however, we should also note Islam's increased salience within broader international relations. In the aftermath of 9/11 and the declaration by the US of a 'global war on terror', Islam has come to inform the perception and positions of states and other actors outside the Middle East. Terms such as 'jihad' and topics such as the Sunni–Shia divide or ISIS and how to combat it are now the stuff of household conversation across Europe, Russia, and North America. In the field of international security, Islamism has in many regards come to play much the same function as communism during the Cold War, with various policymakers and commentators figuring it as the West's chief ideological 'other'. In a geopolitical environment in which efforts to deter militant Islam carry an increasing premium in the eyes of Western powers, numerous countries have sought to use their stated commitment to fighting terrorism as a bargaining chip in their own efforts to secure increased levels of development assistance or lucrative memberships in international organizations. More recently, a string of popular revolutions across the Arab world—and the instability and conflict that have followed in their wake—have brought renewed salience to debates about Islamism, sectarianism, and the role of religion in politics. Given the continued resonance of religious language and symbols in public life, the pervasiveness of media, and the increasingly broad range of actors—including states, political parties, non-governmental organizations, and transnational networks—Islam will remain an important feature of international relations in the Middle East and beyond.

Further reading

Abu Sulayman, A. (1993) *Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Methodology and Thought* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought)

An exploration of the possibilities and boundaries of a modern Islamic theory of international relations.

Dawisha, A. (ed.) (1983) *Islam in Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

A collection of case studies analysing the role of Islam in the foreign policies of various key states in the late twentieth century.

Hashmi, S. (ed.) (2002) *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism, and Conflict* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press)

A superb collection of essays providing an overview of Islam, international society, territorial boundaries, and just war.

Khadduri, M. (1955) *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press)

A classic account of Islamic legal thought on war and armed conflict between states.

Mandaville, P. (2014) *Islam and Politics* (London: Routledge)
A broad overview of Islam, politics, and the impact of global factors, with significant coverage of the Middle East.

Murden, S. (2002) *Islam, the Middle East, and the New Global Hegemony* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner)
An analysis of Middle Eastern political responses to globalization and the role of Islam.

Piscatori, J. (1986) *Islam in a World of Nation-States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
Justifiably the standard reference point on Islam and international relations; an excellent overview of Islamic thought and practice regarding the world system of states.

Questions

1. Have IR scholars succeeded in accommodating 'Islam' into their theoretical approaches?
2. What is meant by the 'Islamic revival'?
3. To what extent has Islam influenced the foreign policies of Middle Eastern states?
4. Examine the effects of the Arab Spring on the role of Islam in the international relations of the Middle East.
5. Has Islam been a source of unity or fragmentation in Middle East politics and International Relations?