

## The Saylor Foundation's "Emergence of Militant Islamic Fundamentalism"

The term "Islamic fundamentalism" describes a broad range of political and religious views that can be summarized as advocating a return to the "fundamentals" of Islam. The term "fundamentalism" is derived from a twentieth-century Christian movement in the United States that sought to return Christianity to the fundamentals of the faith as expressed in the Christian Bible. Because so-called Islamic fundamentalists are not a homogenous group, identifying the specific "fundamentals" to which society ought to return is difficult; one sect's "fundamentals" is another sect's apostasy. In day-to-day use, "fundamentalism" or "fundamentalist" tends to be an epithet describing a conservative, religious-based ideology antagonistic to anything which contradicts a literal interpretation of some form of allegedly divinely inspired scripture. This definition, unfortunately, is so broad as to make any sort of objective classification nearly impossible.

Moreover, there is no agreement on *when* Islamic fundamentalism emerged; some scholars trace its emergence to the eighteenth-century, when growing Muslim anger toward European imperialism led some to conclude that only a return to "true" Islam could give the Muslims power to reclaim their past glory. Other scholars see the emergence of fundamentalist Islam in the 1910s and 20s in response to the secularizing trends of the Young Turks and their counterparts in the Arab world. Still other scholars claim that true Islamic fundamentalism emerged only after World War II in response to encroachments



by the Soviet Union into Central Asia and the Middle East. Because scholars have had trouble defining exactly what Islamic fundamentalism is (if such a thing can even be said to exist) and when it emerged, they have been at a loss to describe its underlying causes; most simply point to Muslim feelings of anger toward the particular social, political, and economic changes of the period under discussion. For instance, according to scholar Beverly Milton Edwards, the roots of Islamic fundamentalism can be traced to the fact that, since the Second World War, many Muslim countries have been “subject to a range of forces: foreign rule and occupation, movements for independence, rising nationalism and secularism, growing Islamist movements, reform, revolution and repression.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Beverly Milton Edwards, *Islamic Fundamentalism Since 1945* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 1.

