

What is Islamism?

The terms "Islamism", "extremist Islam", "militant Islam", "radical Islam", "radical fundamentalist Islam", or "Islam integriste" (Islamism) are all roughly synonymous.

While none of these are terms used by Muslims to refer to themselves, they are all terms today which have become widely accepted in the rest of the world for denoting and referring to radical extremist Islam, or the call for the forceful and violent propagation of Islam through aggressive militant action.

Modern-day Islamists commonly regard the days of the Prophet Muhammad and of his immediate successors - which coincidentally coincided with the era of Islam's most far-reaching military conquests - to be the exemplary era in Islam, and therefore are the sole and over-riding source of their inspiration.

Of course, even in moderate and more "mainstream" circles of Islamic thought and practice, Muslims are expected and required to follow the tradition of the Prophet and to seek guidance in the conduct of his companions and successors.

The Islamists, however, focus on one particular aspect of that tradition - the call for militant "jihad", to "fight for the sake of Allah", for the defense (as they see it) and/or glory of Islam itself, as key to their interpretation of the role and destiny of Islam in society and the world.

Extremist Islam is not only directed at non-Muslims, or those seen as "non-believers", or "infidels". It is also quite commonly directed against brethren populations of Muslims - Muslims who do not share or practice that exact same or specific interpretation or practices of Islam as the Islamists.

According to the Islamist doctrine, no society can be truly Muslim if it does not make "jihad" - or the waging of war against the enemies of Islam - as its first priority. "Peace", in such a context, is not the absence of conflict, peace is the absence of opposition, and the conquest of all who oppose the "will of Allah", and the imposition of strict Islamic law.

In certain contexts, these Islamists refer to themselves as mujahidun, or "warriors of jihad". They teach (and believe) that the greatest honor is to become a shahid (martyr), by dying fighting for the "glory of Allah".

The Islamists refer to their movement as al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya or "the Islamic Awakening", or simply al-Da'wa, or "the call / the propagation" [of Islam].