**Militant Islam**

Like most major world religions, Islam's historical development has affected political, economic, and military trends both inside and outside its primary geographic zones of reach (see Islamic world). As with Christendom, the concept of an *Islamic world* may be useful in looking at different periods of human history; similarly useful is an understanding of the identification with a quasi-political community of believers, or *ummah*, on the part of Islam's practitioners down the centuries.

Islam appeared in Arabia in the 7th century . Within a century of Muhammad's first recitations of the Qur'an, an Islamic state stretched from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to Central Asia in the east. This empire did not remain unified for long; the new polity soon broke into a civil war known to Islamic historians as the Fitna, and later affected by a Second Fitna. After this, there would be rival dynasties claiming the caliphate, or leadership of the Muslim world, and many Islamic states and empires offered only token obedience to a caliph unable to unify the Islamic world.

Despite this fragmentation of Islam as a political community, the empires of the Abbasid caliphs, the Mughals, and the Seljuk Turk, Safavid Persia and Ottomans were among the largest and most powerful in the world. Arabs made many Islamic centers of culture and science and produced notable scientists, astronomers, mathematicians, doctors and philosophers during the Golden Age of Islam. Technology flourished; there was much investment in economic infrastructure, such as irrigation systems and canals; stress on the importance of reading the Qur'an produced a comparatively high level of literacy in the general populace.

Later, in the 18th and 19th centuries C.E., Islamic regions fell under the sway of European imperial powers. Following World War I, the remnants of the Ottoman empire were parceled out as European protectorates. After many centuries, no major, widely-accepted claim to the caliphate (which had been at least claimed by the Ottomans) remained.

Although affected by various ideologies, such as communism, during much of the twentieth century, Islamic identity and Islam's salience on political questions have arguably increased during the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. Rapid growth, western interests in Islamic regions, international conflicts and globalization have influenced Islam's importance in shaping the world of the twenty-first century.

**Note on early Islamic historiography**

There are several Muslim versions of early Islamic history, as written by the Sunni, Shi'a, and Ibadi sects. 19th century Western scholars tended to privilege the Sunni versions; the Sunni are the largest sect, and their books and scholars were easily available. Over the last hundred years, Western scholars have become much more willing to question the orthodox view and to advance new theories and new narratives. Still today, many parts of Islamic history are not as well known internationally as other components of history, such as that of the west.

**Muhammad**

By his death in 632, Muhammad had managed to unite the entire Arabian peninsula.

Arabia before Muhammad was scantily populated by various Arabic-speaking people. Some were Bedouin, pastoral nomads organized in tribes. Some were agriculturalists, living either in oases in the north, or in the more fertile and thickly settled areas to the south (now Yemen and Oman). At that time the majority of Arabs followed polytheistic religions, although a few tribes followed Judaism, Christianity (including Nestorians) or Zoroastrianism. The city of Mecca was a religious center for some of the northern Arabian polytheists, as it contained the sacred well of Zamzam and a small temple, the Ka'aba.

Muhammad was born on the outskirts of Mecca in the Year of the Elephant. Most Muslims equate this with the Gregorian year 570 but a few prefer 571. He was orphaned at an early age and was raised by his uncle Abu Talib. He became a trader, married a wealthy widow, and could have looked forward to a life of ease and prosperity.

However, when he was some forty years old, he experienced what he apparently believed to be a divine revelation while he was meditating in a cave outside Mecca. This would have been in 610 C.E. After an initial period of doubt and fear, he started to preach to his kinfolk and then in public, to all Meccans.

Muhammad believed he had been chosen by God, like the Hebrew prophets before him, to preach repentance, submission to God, and a coming day of judgment. He said he was not preaching a new religion, just reviving the old and pure tradition which he thought the Christians and Jews had debased. He attracted followers.

In 622 A.D, Muhammad and many of his followers fled to the neighboring city of Medina. This migration is called the *Hijra*; it was the first year of Muhammad's "reign" as a secular ruler as well as a religious leader. Following the custom of the time, later historians took that year as the start of the Muslim calendar.

The two cities of Mecca and Medina went to war. Muhammad and his followers won one battle (Battle of Badr) and managed to stalemate a Meccan attack in the Battle of the Trench. Through conquest and conversion, Muhammad was able to unite the surrounding tribes behind him and eventually assembled such a large force that Mecca capitulated without a fight. By the time Muhammad died, on June 8, 632, he and his followers had united the entire Arabian peninsula under Islam, and had started to expand into the areas now known as Syria and Iraq.

**Rashidun**

After Muhammad passed away, a series of Caliphs governed the Islamic State: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali. These first Caliphs are popularly known as the "Rashidun" or rightly guided Caliphs.

The Rashidun made significant conquests, and brought large areas under the fold of Islam.

Abu Bakr's short reign (632-34) was occupied by the Ridda wars - rebellions of Bedouin Arabs. During Umar's rule, Muslim armies invaded Palestine and Mesopotamia. At the Battle of Yarmuk (636), Muslim armies won a crushing victory over the Byzantines, thus paving the way for the conquest of Egypt and Syria. After a decisive victory over the Sassanid empire at the Battle of al-Qādisiyyah in 637, Muslims overwhelmed the Persians in Mesopotamia. Five years later, after the Battle of Nihawānd, Persia was effectively included in the expanding Islamic empire.

**The First Fitna**

Umar was succeeded by Uthman ibn Affan, another of Muhammad's earliest followers. Under Uthman, the new empire fell into a civil war called the Fitna, or disorder. Some of Muhammad's family and earliest followers were unhappy with Uthman, feeling that he was unduly favoring his kinsfolk and acting less like a religious leader and more like a king. Rebellious soldiers killed Uthman and offered the leadership to Ali ibn Abi Talib, Muhammad's cousin, foster-son, and son-in-law. Many Muslims (in particular, those who had their own designs on the Caliphate) refused to accept Ali as a leader; he spent his brief caliphate fighting against dissenting factions and Uthman's relatives, the Umayyads. Ali was killed by a Khariji assassin and the Umayyads claimed the caliphate. They managed to retain leadership of the majority of Muslims for several generations, but save for a brief period, never again ruled over an undivided Islamic empire. The Islamic faith diverged as well, splitting into the two main sects of today (Sunni and Shi'a). (This is perhaps a gross over-simplification of a complex religious history).

**Early Caliphate**

After the Rashidun, a series of Caliphates were established. Each caliphate was a monarchy, developed its own unique laws and adopted a particular sect of Islam as a State religion. Until the ninth century the Muslim World would remain a single political entity under the leadership of one Caliph.

**Ummayads**

Ali was succeeded by Muawiya I, who became the first Ummayad caliph. The capital, which had been moved to Iraq, was shifted to Damascus, and an elected caliph was replaced by a hereditary Sultan.

Under the Ummayads, the Muslim world expanded into North Africa and Spain in the West, and Central Asia in the East. The glory achieved by Muslims during this period was without comparison. According to Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair. By the early eighth century, the Islamic empire stretched from North Africa on the west to Transoxiana and Sind (modern-day Pakistan) in the east, nearly one quarter the way around the globe, an area that made the empires of the Persians, Alexander the Great, and the Romans seem puny...The Muslims, no longer Arab merchants from the heartland of Arabia, became masters of the economic and cultural heartland of the Near East, and their faith, Islam, was no longer as obscure Arabian cult but the religion of an imperial elite.

Much of the population of this new empire was non-Muslim, and aside from a protection tax (*jizya*) and other restrictions, the conquered people found their religions tolerated. Indeed, Muslim authorities often discouraged conversions. Under the Umayyads, would-be converts had to find an Arab patron who would adopt them into his tribe. Once they were honorary Arabs they could convert.

Nevertheless, most of the population eventually converted to Islam. Whether this was a fast or a slow movement is a topic hotly debated in academia, and only to be settled by meticulous country-by-country studies. Ummayad conversion policies, however, did create tensions in the empire as greater numbers of non-Arabs (mostly Persians) converted. The tensions increased when Shiites joined the protest against Ummayad rule. Umayyad rule was interrupted by a second civil war (the Second Fitna) in 680, re-established, then ended in 758.

**Abbasids**

The Abbasids overthrew the increasingly unpopular Ummayads and took over the caliphate. They moved the capital to Baghdad (closer to Persia), and made Persian the second lingua franca (after Arabic) of the empire. During this time Baghdad became, perhaps, the greatest cultural center of the world. The Abbasids were said to be descendants of Abbas the uncle of the Prophet claiming that they were the 'messiah' or saviors of the people under the Ummayad rule. Abbasid caliphs Harun al-Rashid and Al-Mamun were great patrons of arts and sciences, and enabled these domains to flourish. Islamic philosophy also developed as the Shariah was codified, and the four Madhabs were established. This era also saw the rise of classical Sufism. The greatest achievement, however, was completion of the canonical collections of Hadith of Sahih Bukhari and others. After this, there would be rival dynasties claiming the caliphate, or leadership of the Muslim world, and many Islamic states and empires offered only token obedience to a caliph unable to unify the Islamic world.

**Regional powers**

The Abbasids soon became caught within three way rivalry of Arabs, Persian and the immigrant Turks. In addition, the cost of running a large empire became too great. The political unity of Islam began to disintegrate. The emirates, still recognizing the theoretical leadership of the caliphs, drifted into independence, and a brief revival of control was ended with the establishment of rival caliphates. Eventually the Abbasids ruled as puppets for the Buwayhid emirs.

**Fatimids**

The Fatimids, who believed to be the descendants of *Fatima*, established sovereignty over Egypt, North Africa, Sicily and Syria. Under the Fatimids, the city of Cairo was established and built into an imperial military and cultural center. The Fatimid territories of Syria and Palestine, fell to the invading Seljuks in the late eleventh century. They would, however, continue to rule in Egypt until its conquest by Saladin in the late twelfth century.

**Seljuks**

A series of new invasions swept over the Islamic world. The newly converted Seljuk Turks swept across and conquered most of Islamic Asia, Syria and Palestine. The Seljuks made religion an instrument of the state, while giving the clergy significant say over the affairs of the government. They also put an end to Caliphal institutions. These policies would be carried out by successive governments of Nur al-Din, Saladin and Mamluks. Shortly after, they won a decisive victory over the Byzantines at the Battle of Manzikert, paving the way for further conquest of Anatolia.

**Crusades**

In 1095 Pope Urban II launched the First Crusade and captured Edessa, Antioch, Tripoli and Jerusalem. The Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem emerged and for a time controlled many holy sites of Islam. Saladin, however, restored unity, defeated the Fatimids and put an end to the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Later the Second Crusade was launched but was unsuccessful. Other crusades were launched with at least the nominal intent to recapture the holy city, but hardly more was ever accomplished than the looting and occupation of Constantinople, leaving the Byzantine Empire severely weakened and ripe for later conquest. Christian-majority countries would regain a firm hold on Jerusalem in 1917, during the First World War.

**Mamluks**

In 1250, the short-lived Ayyubid dynasty (established by Saladin) was overthrown by slave regiments, and new dynasty - the Mamluks - were born. The Mamluks soon expanded into Palestine, expelled the remaining Crusader states and repelled the Mongols from invading Syria. Thus they united Syria and Egypt for the longest period of time between the Abbasid and Ottoman empires. Legacy During this time, great advancements were made in the areas of astronomy, poetry, philosophy science and mathematics.

**Islam in Asia**

**Indian Subcontinent**

Islamic rule came to the region in the 8th century, when Muhammad bin Qasim conquered Sindh. Muslim conquests were expanded under Mahmud and the Ghaznavids until the late twelfth century, when the Ghurids overran the Ghaznavids and extended the conquests in northern India. Qutb-ud-din Aybak, conquered Delhi in 1206 and began the reign of the Delhi Sultanates.

In the fourteenth century, Alauddin Khilji extended Muslim rule south to Gujarat, Rajasthan and Deccan. Various other Muslim dynasties also formed and ruled across India from the 13th to the 18th century such as the Qutb Shahi and the Bahmani, but none rivalled the power and extensive reach of the Mughal Empire at its peak.

**China**

During the lifetime of Muhammad, Arab merchants reached China via the Silk Road and introduced Islam. Then, in 650, the third Caliph, Uthman ibn Affan, sent an official delegation to the Tang dynasty. The Chinese emperor ordered the establishment of the first Chinese mosque in the city of Chang'an, and this event is considered to be the birth of Islam in China. By the early ninth century Islam had reached as far south as Hangzhou.

The Mongol invasions of China and Persia, brought the two regions under a single political entity. This led to increased contacts and cultural exchange between China and the Muslim world. Following the Mongols, the succeeding Ming dynasty was also tolerant of Muslims. During its reign many Muslim attained high posts. These policies were, however, reversed by the Qing dynasty, when it came to power.

**Southeast Asia**

In the late 13th century, Muslim merchants and missionaries began to bring Islam to Southeast Asia. Soon, many Sufi missionaries translated classical Sufi literature from Arabic and Persian into Malay. Coupled with the composing of original Islamic literature in Malay, this led the way to the transformation of Malay into an Islamic language. [[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Islam#_note-7#_note-7) By 1292, when Marco Polo visited Sumatra, most of the inhabitants had converted to Islam. The first Muslim kingdom was founded by a Javan Prince on the Malay Peninsula. Through trade and commerce, Islam spread to Borneo and Java, Indonesia. By late 15th century, Islam been introduced to the Philippines.

As Islam spread, three main Muslim political powers emerged. Acheh, the most important Muslim power, was based firmly in Northern Sumatra. It controlled much of the area between Southeast Asia and India. The Sultanate also attracted Sufi poets. The second Muslim power was the federation of Sultanates on the Malay peninsula. The third power emerged in Java, where several Muslim powers defeated the local Majapahit kingdom in the early 16th century.

**Mongol Invasions**

By the early 13th century a very serious threat had arrived. The Mongols, who invaded Baghdad in 1258, had conquered most Islamic territories east of Egypt. The Horde permanently ended the Abbasid caliphate and the Golden Age of medieval Islam, leaving the Islamic world damaged and confused. Some Mongols later converted to Islam and developed their own sophisticated and diverse trade based culture, integrating elements from every corner of Eurasia.

**Three Muslim empires**

In the 15th century and 16th centuries three major Muslim empires were created: the aforementioned Ottoman Empire in much of the Middle East, Balkans and Northern Africa; the Safavid Empire in Iran; and the Moghul Empire in India. These new imperial powers were made possible by the discovery and exploitation of gunpowder, and more efficient administration. By the end of the 19th century, all three had been weakened or destroyed by massive Western cultural influence and military ambitions.

**Mughal Empire**

The Mughal Empire was a product of the various Mongol invasions into Persia and India. Founded by Babur in 1526, the empire ruled most of present-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan for several centuries, before it fell to the British in 1857. The empire left a lasting legacy on Indian culture and architecture. Amongst the famous buildings built by the Mughals, include: Taj Mahal, Red Fort, Babri Mosque, Badshahi Mosque, Lahore Fort, Shalimar Gardens and Agra Fort. During the empire's reign of power, Muslim communities flourished all over India, particularly in Gujarat, Bengal and Hyderabad. Various Sufi orders from Afghanistan and Iran were very active throughout the region. Consequently, more than a quarter of the population converted to Islam.

**Safavid Empire**

The Safavids ruled Iran from early 16th century to late 18th century. Although claiming to be the descendants of Ali ibn Abu Talib, the Safavids were originally Sunni (the name "Safavid" comes from a Sufi order called *Safavi*). Their origins go back to Firuz Shah Zarrinkolah, an Iranian local dignitary from Iran's north. During their rule, the Safavids imposed Shiism as the State religion, thus giving Iran a separate identity from its Sunni neighbors.

In 1524, Tahmasp acceded to the throne, initiating reviving arts in the region. Carpet making became a major industry, gaining new importance in Iran's cities. But the finest of all artistic revivals was the commissioning of the *Shahnama*. The *Shahnama* was meant to glorify the reign of the *Shah* through artistic means. The two-volume copy contained 258 large paintings to illustrate the works of Firdawsi, a Persian poet. The Shah also prohibited the drinking of wine, forbade the use of hashish and ordered the removal of gambling casinos, taverns and brothels.

Tahmasp's grandson, Shah Abbas I, also managed to increase the glory of the empire. Abbas restored the shrine of Imam Reza at Mashhad, and restored the dynastic shrine at Ardabil. Both shrines received jewelry, fine manuscripts and Chinese porcelains. Abbas also moved the empire's capital to Isfahan, revived old ports, and established thriving trade with the Europeans. Amongst Abbas's most visible cultural achievements was the construction of *Naqsh-i Jahan* ("Design of the World"). The plaza, located near a Friday mosque, covered twenty acres, thus dwarfing Piazza San Marco and St. Peter's Square.

**Ottoman Empire**

The Suleiman Mosque (Süleymaniye Camii) in Istanbul was built on the order of sultan Suleiman the Magnificent by the great Ottoman architect Sinan in 1557.

The Islamic world reached a new peak (albeit not comparable to the Golden Age of the Abbasiah) under the Ottoman (Uthmaniah) Empire. The Turks migrated from the Central Asian steppe and at first established a tiny state in Anatolia (modern day Turkey). In 1453, after a two-month siege, Ottoman Janissaries and cannons overwhelmed Constantinople. The millennium-old Byzantine Empire was suddenly absorbed by the new Ottoman Empire, which would extend its influence over most of the Islamic world and reach deep into Christian Europe.

The Ottoman empire, which was making great strides in conquering the East, threatened to conquer Central and Western Europe. In 1529, the Siege of Vienna failed, stopping any further Ottoman advances into Eastern Europe. The Battle of Vienna in 1683 precipitated the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from many parts of Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

**The 20th century**

The modern age brought radical technological and organizational changes to Europe and Islamic countries found themselves less modern when compared to the many western nations. Europe's state-based government and rampant colonization allowed the West to dominate the globe economically and forced Islamic countries to question change.

**The end of World War I: European powers control the Middle East**

Some Muslim territories, for example Syria, were granted at least nominal independence after the end of the First World War and some gained full independence after the second. Many Muslim countries sought to imitate European political organization and nationalism began to emerge in the Muslim world. Countries like Egypt, Syria, and Turkey organized their governments with definable polities and sought to develop national pride among their citizens. Other places, like Iraq, weren't as successful due to a lack of unity.

**The end of the Caliphate and the rise of the Saudis**

Some Muslim countries, such as Turkey and Egypt, sought to separate Islam from the secular government. In other cases, such as Saudi Arabia, the new government brought out new religious expression in the reemergence of the puritanical form of Sunni Islam known to its detractors as Wahhabism which found its way into the Saudi royal family.

**Wahhabism**

During the 18th century, Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab (1703–1792) led a religious movement (Wahhabism) in eastern Arabia that sought to purify Islam. Wahhab wanted to return Islam to what he thought were its original principles as taught by the *as-salaf as-saliheen* (the earliest converts to Islam) and rejected what he regarded as corruptions introduced by Bida (religious innovation) and Shirk (polytheism). He allied himself with the House of Saud, which eventually triumphed over the Rashidis to control Central Arabia, and led several revolts against the Ottoman empire. Initial success (the conquest of Mecca and Medina) was followed by ignominious defeat, then a resurgence which culminated in the creation of Saudi Arabia.

**Partition of India and establishment of Pakistan**

The *partition of India* refers to the creation in August 1947 of two sovereign states of India and Pakistan. The two nations were formed out of the former British Raj, including treaty states, when Britain granted independence to the area (see Undivided India). In particular, the term refers to the partition of Bengal and Punjab, the two main provinces of the would be Pakistan. In 1947, after the partition of India, Pakistan became the largest Islamic Country in the world (by population). Today, Pakistan is still the second largest Islamic Country in the world. Pakistan is presently the only nuclear power of the Muslim world and is one of the more developed nations among the Muslim countries. Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, by population. India has the third largest Muslim population, followed by Bangladesh.

**Arab-Israeli conflict**

The Arab-Israeli conflict spans about a century of political tensions and open hostilities. It involves the establishment of the modern State of Israel as a Jewish nation state, as well as the relationship between the Arab nations and the state of Israel (see related Israeli-Palestinian conflict). Despite involving a relatively small land area and number of casualties, the conflict has been the focus of worldwide media and diplomatic attention for decades.

Many countries, individuals and non-governmental organizations elsewhere in the world feel involved in this conflict for reasons such as cultural and religious ties with Islam, Arab culture, Christianity, Judaism, Jewish culture or for ideological, human rights, or strategic reasons. While some consider the Arab-Israeli conflict a part of (or a precursor to) a wider clash of civilizations between the Western World and the Arab or Muslim world, others oppose this view. Animosity emanating from this conflict has caused numerous attacks on supporters (or perceived supporters) of one side by supporters of the other side in many countries around the world.

**Oil wealth and petropolitics dominate the Middle East**

Between 1953 and 1964, King Saud re-organized the government of the monarchy his father, Ibn Saud, had created. Saudi Arabia's new ministries included Communication (1953) Agriculture and Water (1953), Petroleum (1960), Pilgrimage and Islamic Endowments (1960), Labor and Social Affairs (1962) and Information (1963). He also put his Talal, one of his many younger brothers (by 29 years his younger) in charge of the Ministry of Transport.

In 1958-59, Talal proposed the formation of a National Council. As he proposed it, it would have been a consultative body, not a legislature. Still, he thought of it as a first step toward broader popular participation in the government. Talal presented this proposal to the king when the Crown Prince was out of the country. Saud simply forwarded the proposal to the ulama asking them whether a National Council was a legitimate institution in Islam. The idea seems to have died in committee, so to speak. It would be revived more than three decades later. A Consultative Council came into existence in 1992.

Meantime, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries came into existence in 1960. For the first decade or more of its existence, it was ineffectual in terms of increasing revenue for member nations. But it would have its day. Tension between Faisal and Saud continued to mount until a final showdown in 1964. Saud threatened to mobilize the Royal Guard against Faisal and Faisal threatened to mobilize the National Guard against Saud. It was Saud who blinked, abdicating and leaving for Cairo, later Greece. He would die there, in 1969. Faisal then became King.

In 1967, Israel won a whirlwind conflict in six days. In response, Arab leaders (including King Faisal) held a conference in Khartoum in August. They all agreed on three negative slogans with respect to Israel: “no recognition, no negotiations, no peace.” Faisal agreed that Saudi Arabia would use some of its oil wealth to finance the “front-line states,” those that bordered Israel, in their struggle.

The 1967 war had other effects. It effectively closed the Suez canal, it may have contributed to the revolution in Libya that put Muammar al-Qaddafi in power, and it led in May 1970 to the closure of the "tapline" from Saudi Arabia through Syria to Lebanon. These developments had the effect of increasing the importance of the petroleum in [Libya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libya), which is a conveniently short (and canal-free) shipping distance from Europe.

In 1970, it was Occidental Petroleum which constituted the first crack in the wall of oil company solidarity in dealing with the oil producing nations; specifically, in this case, with the demands for price increases of the new Qaddafi government.

In October 1973, another war between Israel and its Muslim neighbors, known as the Yom Kippur War, got underway just as oil company executives were heading to Vienna, Austria, site of a planned meeting with OPEC leaders. OPEC had been emboldened by the success of Libya's demands anyway, and the war strengthened the unity of their new demands. The centrality of petroleum, the Arab-Israeli Conflict and political and economic instability and uncertainty remain constant features of the politics of the region.

**Two Iranian revolutions**

While the events chronicled above were underway, the Shah of Iran was pressing (what he considered to be) the modernization of his country. For example, in the *white revolution* of 1963 he abolished the feudal system of land ownership, and in the process reduced the income of some of the Shia clergy. The Shah's critics at the time said he was trying to secure his hold on power. By 1966, he had become more aggressive in his own dealings with the oil companies.

A decade later, the Shah decreed women's suffrage and replaced the lunar (Islamic) calendar with the solar calendar for official use in 1976. Both moves alienated Shia clerics. These were among the conditions for the Iranian revolution of 1978-- 1979, which deposed the Shah and put Ayatollah Khomeini in power in Iran.