Political Islamic Fundamentalism and Jihad

Islamic fundamentalism is primarily used in the Western world to describe Islamist groups. It describes the beliefs of traditional Muslims: that they should restrict themselves to literal and conservative interpretations of their sacred texts, the Qur’an and Hadith. By extension, fundamentalism may include a variety of religious movements and groups in Muslim communities which may be entirely apolitical.

In this process, Islamic fundamental movement has become a political movement, and some groups turned radical by construing the concept of Jihad in its own way.

The first modern Islamic fundamental group was the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt involved in a wide range of activities from community services to mainstream political activism. Modern Islamist terrorist groups are often inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood, which was the prototype of the later Islamist groups.

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Jihad (Arabic: ﺝﻬﺎﺩ jihād) is an Islamic term, from the Arabic root j-h-d (to exert utmost effort, to strive, struggle), which connotes a wide range of meanings: anything from an inward spiritual struggle to attain perfect faith to a political or military struggle to further the Islamic cause. The meaning of "Islamic cause" is, of course, open to interpretation. Mainstream Muslims consider jihad to be the most misunderstood aspect of their religion by non-Muslims. The legitimacy of the goals and methods used by the various Islamic movements who adopt the terminology of jihad is often brought into question, usually by moderate and liberal Muslims.

The term is frequently mistranslated into English as a "holy war"; however, the concept of jihad encompasses more than just warfare, and a more accurate translation probably would be "holy struggle", "righteous struggle" or "holy endeavour". The denotation is of a challenging or difficult, (frequently)opposed effort, made either in accomplishment or resistance. A person who engages in any form of jihad is called a "mujahid", meaning "striver" or "struggler". This term is most often used to mean a person who engages in fighting, but, for example a Muslim struggling to memorize the Qur'an is called a mujahid. Jihad, a biased interpretation is sometimes used to describe militant Islamic groups, including Islamic terrorism.

After the September 11th attacks, whatever the accomplishment of Islamic Fundamental movements as a social and political movement, only its violent activities are known in the West. We must distinguish strictly Islamic fundamental movement from Islamic radicalism and Islamic terrorism.

[Key words: Islamic Fundamentalism, Jihad, Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic Radicalism, Islamic Terrorism]