

8-1-1989

Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, by Olivier Roy

Shahrough Akhavi

University of South Carolina - Columbia, akhavi@sc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/poli_facpub



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Publication Info

Published in *Problems of Communism*, Volume 38, Issue 4, 1989, pages 117-122.

<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000500968>

© 1989 by the U.S. Government Printing Office

This Book Review is brought to you by the Political Science, Department of at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

Books

Islamic Radicalism

Shahrough Akhavi

OLIVIER ROY. *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

HENRY MUNSON, JR. *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East*. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1988.

EMMANUEL SIVAN. *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1985.

MILITANT Islamic groups burst into prominence on the Middle Eastern political scene in the 1970's. In Iran, a radical Islamic movement, led by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, effected a revolution with the avowed intention of establishing a theocracy. Other radical Islamic organizations have been active in Afghanistan (where they have fought both the Marxist-Leninist regime in Kabul and the Soviet occupiers), in Lebanon, and in Egypt. The works under review, although different in many respects, share a concern with radical Islam. These works also show that although the salience of radical ideology might be declining in other parts of the world, radical Islam retains an attraction for some disaffected elements of Muslim societies.

Islamic radicals insist on the inex-

tricability of religion and politics in the Islamic world view and attempt to uphold the unity of theory and practice in Islam, using violence, if necessary, to achieve their goals. Islamic radicalism, then, represents what may be termed a "militant orthopraxy." Radicals maintain that the Islamic doctrine of salvation calls for the creation of a community of believers in this world and obligates believers to strengthen and enlarge that community. By contrast, attempting to fulfill God's commandments as a private individual retards the realization of salvation and therefore may be seen as a derogation of Islam.

In examining radical groups having modernist concerns, Olivier Roy focuses on Afghanistan, although he makes brief references to Iran and Pakistan. Roy applies to these groups the neologism "Islamist," which denotes an Islam oriented toward action. (For Roy, the word "Islam" itself carries the standard ethico-cultural connotations.) Henry Munson reluctantly uses the word "fundamentalist," *laute de mieux*, in treating Islamic radicalism in Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. Emmanuel Sivan prefers the word "radical." His work concentrates on Egypt, although he devotes some attention to Lebanon and Syria.

The approaches of these works also differ. Roy—an anthropologist—examines both ideas and or-

ganization, and in large measure, his analysis relies on field research that he conducted over a five-year period. Munson—also an anthropologist—synthesizes the secondary literature on his topic. Sivan's book is an essay on the history of ideas, with only passing (although at times informative) treatment of the organization and structure of Islamic radical groups.

ROY'S analysis of the Afghan Islamists shows that they seek to use modern institutions, such as political parties, and science and technology to vindicate the eternal verities of Islamic revelation. The Islamists—men of action—have joined with the clergy—professional men of religion—to resist the Marxist-Leninist regime in Kabul and its Soviet supporters. The cler-

Shahrough Akhavi is Professor in the Department of Government and International Studies at the University of South Carolina, (Columbia, SC). He is the author of Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period, as well as numerous articles in such journals as Comparative Studies in Society and History, The Middle East Journal, Middle Eastern Studies, Iranian Studies, Current History, and SAIS Review.