

Global Political Islam

By *Peter Mandaville*

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For the general reader interested in global political affairs Islamist organizations like the Palestinian Hamas, the Lebanese Hizbollah and the transnational a-Qa'ida, as well as individuals like for example Usama bin Laden, may appear as incomprehensible and beyond rational understanding. Numerous scholarly books on the subject have not always helped readers to fathom the phenomena of Islamism, or as it is called in the title of Peter Mandaville's latest book, *Global Political Islam*. However, Mandaville, a Professor of Government and Politics at George Mason University, Washington DC, takes the effort to explain and analyze the complex topic of political Islam in a very coherent manner. Moreover, this book is, as it is stated in the introduction, directed to students and scholars in the humanities and social sciences, but in my opinion it is a most readable book also for readers interested in the subject of global Islamic movements in general. The reason for such a statement is that the book not only comprehensively analyzes global political Islam, but also provides a theoretical perspective of the relationship and interaction between Islamic traditions, Islamic movements and the practice of politics – a perspective that is of value to anyone interested in contemporary interpretations of Islam.

The outline of Mandaville's book is clearly pedagogical in the sense that it starts by a discussion of the perspective of the book,

and thereafter after he presents a historical background to the present Islamic movements and their political involvement. The aim is to understand the historical context and complexity of contemporary Muslim politics. The following chapters describe the formative period of Islamism, Mandaville portrays the ideological foundation for how Islamists have developed an understanding of Islam as a political strategy and, more comprehensively, a philosophy of the society. In these discussions Mandaville contextualizes global political Islam and discusses how it has developed in relation to various forms of states, for example weak or failed states. In regard to weak or failed states, Islamism is studied in situations in which the state has more or less collapsed, such as in Palestine. The overall objective is to analyze how Islam functions politically in the context of various societal systems through a number of empirical examples of Islam and politics. The last part of the book contains chapters discussing radical Islamism and jihad beyond the nation state, Muslim transnationalism, the question concerning who speaks for Islam and the developments beyond Islamism. This final part of the book scrutinizes the spaces, institutions and settings in which Islamic politics occur in a global context. The objective is to demonstrate that global political Islam is not a monolithic phenomenon. Instead, it appears in a variety of forms and develops along disparate trajectories. The book concludes by stating that

a simple summary the various chapters are not possible. As an alternative, Mandaville presents a discussion on three domains; Islamist politics, religious knowledge and Muslim identity followed by a critical discussion on the term “post-Islamism” and how it has been conceptualized. In the end he concludes by reiterating his idea that the challenge for us all, scholars and students, is to move beyond Islamism and widen the boundaries of what is to be characterized as Muslim politics. If, paraphrasing Mandaville we erase the supposed boundaries of “religion” and “politics”, and move beyond today’s understandings of the state, we will understand the complex impact of globalization and the various forces in Muslim politics in a more comprehensive manner.

In my opinion one of the many strong assets of this book is that in a very eloquent manner not only combines scholarship in political science and Islamology, but it melts them together into a truly cross-

disciplinary undertaking. The pedagogical ambition to combine in depth studies of Islamist movements with shorter and supplementary textboxes containing other complementary examples makes the book very useful as a course book. At the same time, the book is of interest to scholars with an interest in contemporary Islam, not only because of the empirical studies, but also in terms of the theoretical perspective that is the foundation of the book. In short, Mandaville’s thinking on how to approach Muslim politics is challenging and rests on an understanding that it is crucial to analyze it in regard to local, regional and world issues. Hence, this is an understanding of “Islam” as a social phenomenon in which Muslim politics is produced in interplay with the society at large. This way of analyzing Muslim politics makes *Global Political Islam* one of the best scholarly books on Islamism and Muslim politics on the market today.

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US Foreign Policy in the Middle East: From Crises to Change

By Yakub Halabi

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Scholars of diplomatic history and politics have long debated the question of how U.S. foreign policy is formulated. In *US Foreign Policy in the Middle East: From Crises to Change*, Yakub Halabi argues that after major crises that have threatened U.S. interests new ideas emerge that bring about

changes in foreign policy. According to Halabi, “A major crisis stimulates change in thinking; power makes change possible; and ideas make change feasible” (p.133). Taking a post-positivist position, Halabi asserts that ideas shape reality more than self-interest or “other observable variables”