

**Islam and Politics** by Peter Mandaville .London and New York: Routledge  
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- **Showkat Ahmad Dar**

The book is an important contribution to the history of Islamic political thought. The book focuses on the political developments that took place during the twentieth century, however, presents a brief but comprehensive historical account of political history of Islam to enable the reader in comprehending the subject clear. In this presentation, he highlighted the political scene and developments in the Islamic countries with special reference to the Islamic political thinkers and leaders and Islamic political movements influencing the political reality of these countries. In the wake of major political challenges to Islam such as Arab Uprisings and the rise of several movements in the name of Islam, the debates on Islam and politics—past and present are everywhere. However, in the myriad of such discussions and deliberations, argues author, Muslim politics, and relation between Islam and politics are less or poorly understood. Among the several reasons, according to the author, is the transplantation of the western set of assumptions about religion and politics onto Islam. In order to understand the real phenomenon of Muslim politics the book addresses the questions including “how to understand the relative importance of the multiple manifestations of Muslim politics around the world and the many competing voices claiming to speak on behalf of Islam? What is the difference between those Islamist movements that emphasize *jihad* and those that pursue politics through nonviolent, even democratic, means and what possible futures might be predicted for political Islam?” Not going through the direct answers to such questions, the book rather attempted to provide a framework to arrive at certain conclusions. In the introductory part, the author deliberates on the issue of Islam and politics in the global perspective. Here he comes up with some basic facts about Islam, understanding of politics relation between religion and politics comparatively in Islamic and Western perspectives. The second chapter of the book deals with the history of Islam and how it emerged in the political scene.

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Before analysing the contemporary nature of Muslim politics, the author highlighted some key concepts and social roles during the transfer of political authority from Prophet down to the Muslim dynasties. Interestingly, seeing the creation of different Muslim empires and their role in Muslim world, the author employed the term “Gunpowder” for three Muslim empires who encountered European imperialism—Safavid Empire (1501-1736), Mughal Empire (1526-1857) and Ottoman Empire (1300-1922). The largest Muslim political power of the time was in the hands of Ottomans and rest of the Muslim World looked them as the symbol of political unity by recognizing it as the institution of the *Khilāfah*. The author maintains that the people under Ottomans enjoyed freedom—the “non-Muslims were organized into religious communities know as *millets*, each of which was ruled according to its own laws.” (p. 56) However, this political grandeur of Ottomans could not stand against European Imperialism and Ottoman Empire was succeeded by modern Turkish Republic.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire was a serious blow to Muslims and in response there arose anti-colonial sentiments across the Muslim world. Despite these anti-colonial slogans, according to the author, “the stage was set for a debate between two (seemingly) distinct and incompatible approaches to Muslim political independence: a system of Islamic political universalism, represented by a renewed caliphate; or the nationalist option, which held language, territory, and shared history as the proper foundations of political order.”(p. 64) While discussing such state formation the author took the issue in light of the figures like Rashid Rida, Ali abd Raziq, Mawlana Mawdudi and Hasan al-Banna and states like Turkey, Egypt, and Pakistan. In order to elucidate the Islamic-ness of Muslim states and their founding or transition to Islamic status, the author has examined Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran in the fifth chapter of the book.

Moreover, the author has tried to differentiate Muslim politics from political Islam and Islamism. Instead of political Islam, the author emphasizes on Muslim politics that according to him “is useful [for allowing the reader] to keep the diversity and pluralism of Islam front and center through an emphasis on Muslims as social actors. To focus on Muslims rather than Islam is to emphasize real people, in real settings, facing real issues.” In its sixth chapter, the book addresses the contemporary Muslim politics under various political circumstances wherein Muslim political actors have sought to fill public voids left by weak, failed or failing states. Focussing mainly on the rise of Hamas in Palestine, Hizbullah in Lebanon, and Taliban in Afghanistan, the author aimed to help the reader understand the

variety of political opportunity structures, mechanisms of social mobilization, and symbolic resources available to Muslim actors in those situations. The next chapters focus on key contemporary issues to examine the interaction of Muslim politics and globalization. The concepts like “Radical Islamism”, “Global Jihad”, “Post-Islamism”, and “Popular Islam” are some key terms to understand the nature of contemporary Islamic political thought.

The author has connoted Islamism in terms of an aspiration to institute a political order that reflects the norms of Islam or a political strategy where groups and parties seek to enter the political systems (Ch. 4) and characterized “Radical Islamism” as “a vision of Islamic political order that rejects the legitimacy of the modern sovereign nation-state and seeks to establish a pan-Islamic polity or renewed caliphate; and/or an emphasis on violent struggle (Jihad) as the primary or even the exclusively legitimate method for the pursuit of political change.”(p.330) After a thorough treatment of the movements like Al-Qaeda and Hizb ut Tahrir, the author has highlighted some future formations of radical Islam. The author maintains, “In the future, Islamist actors increasingly will find themselves contending not only with various secular political currents, but also with new forms of Muslim politics that contest their vision of an Islamic social order and that seek to propose alternative idioms of Islamization and public religiosity” (p. 417).

Above all the book is very helpful for the researchers and students of Islamic political thought as it provides for the reader a concise but comprehensive treatment of political developments and their consequences in the Muslim world. However, despite such historical facts, the political dimension of Islam would be blurred unless verified with the basic tenets of Islam. It is these tenets that are the criteria to judge an act, group or any social mobilization as Islamic or otherwise.

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