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“Struggle for the Soul of Islam”: The Team

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SPECIAL REPORT: STRUGGLE FOR THE SOUL OF ISLAM
SPECIAL REPORT

Struggle for the soul of Islam

A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Many Muslims see America’s war on terror as a war against Islam. And many Americans see Muslims as suicide bombers who murder innocents and target Americans.

Islam, the world’s fastest-growing religion, preaches tolerance, non-violence and respect for human life. But a struggle for the soul of Islam is under way, one that poses challenges for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Radical elements of the religion, bent on attacking America and its allies, use Islam and the notion of holy war to justify assaults by suicide bombers who believe a ride on a Jerusalem bus will buy them a trip to paradise.

The radicals who stoke the fires of violence aren’t many. But their influence extends far beyond their numbers. They form a magnetic field of militancy that threatens to pull the entire religion rightward.

Mainstream Muslim leaders insist they don’t back their radical brethren. Nowhere in the Koran, Islam’s holy book, do leaders say, is there any justification for the pageantry of terror that plays out in headlines nearly every day.

But the volume of these objections is hardly thunderous. Part of the reason is fear. Muslims who speak out risk retaliation from radicals or ostracism from tightly knit Muslim communities.

The growing popularity of Islam should not be underestimated. Politically, culturally and spiritually, its increasing influence is felt in nations around the world. In some countries, radical Islamic groups deliver the health care, education and jobs often neglected by corrupt governments backed by generations of American administrations.

So, do most Muslims really hate America? Or does their tepid response to radicals stem from their resentment of America’s unquestioning alliances with discredited Muslim leaders and with Israel, a nation despised in much of the Islamic world? And how can Islamic and Western cultures coexist?

To address such questions, the Tribune sent reporters around the globe to understand the unfolding drama within this great religion. Throughout the year, we will publish their reports. The first story explores the struggle between moderates and conservatives for control of a suburban Chicago mosque.
Hard-liners won battle for Bridgeview mosque

Chicago Tribune

Sheik Jamal Said stood before the packed mosque and worked the crowd like an auctioneer.

Speaking Arabic, the prayer leader asked for a donation of $10,000. No one responded. He asked for $5,000, and three men raised their hands.

Hundreds of men sat cross-legged before him in the main prayer hall. Women filled the basement, listening over a loudspeaker. All but the youngest girls wore head scarves.

When Sheik Jamal lowered his request to $2,000, more hands shot into the air. The crowd declared, “Allahu Akbar” or “God is great.” $1,000? More hands. $500? Even more. In less than five minutes, he raised $50,000.

While religious leaders often mine congregations for charity, this scene at the Mosque Foundation in suburban Bridgeview stands out for two reasons.

The recipient of the worshipers’ generosity was Sami Al-Arian, a Palestinian activist accused by the U.S. government of aiding terrorists. And

By Tribune staff reporters: Noreen S. Ahmed-Ullah, Kim Barker, Laurie Cohen, Stephen Franklin and Sam Roe

the prayer leader’s passionate appeal is a reflection of the ascendency of Muslim hard-liners at the mosque, one of the most outspoken and embattled in the U.S.

The mosque did not become this way without a struggle. Relying on hundreds of documents and dozens of interviews, the Tribune has pieced together the details of a bitter fight in Bridgeview that saw religious fundamentalists prevail over moderates.

The story is a rare look inside the transformation of an American mosque, the role of Middle Eastern money in shaping Islam and the tensions many Muslims feel as they try to create enclaves in the U.S.

It also provides insight into the wave of fundamentalism sweeping many parts of the world, creating divisions between East and West, between

PLEASE SEE ISLAM, PAGE 14

Tribune photo by Heather Stone

An American flag is hung at the Bridgeview mosque a few days after Sept. 11, 2001. Mosque leaders have denounced the Sept. 11 attacks.
A man holds aloft the Koran at Al Azhar Mosque in Cairo. For at least 500 years, the Islamic world was at the forefront of civilization, the driving force in human development.
Muslims leave the Bridgeview mosque after Friday prayers recently. The mosque opened in the fall of 1981, just in time for Ramadan, the holiest month of the Muslim calendar.
Arab governments and militiants, and within Islam itself.

Some critics inside and outside the religion charge that Islamic fundamentalists foster terrorism by promoting and spreading their beliefs, that religious leaders have not done enough to distance Islam from terrorist acts.

Among the leaders at the Bridgeview mosque are men who have condemned Western culture, praised Palestinian suicide bombers and encouraged members to view society in stark terms: Muslims against the West. Local authorities for years have investigated some mosque officials for possible links to terrorist financing, but no criminal charges have been filed.

Mosque leaders deny encouraging militancy and have denounced terrorism, including the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. They say in the future some may consider prayer, fasting and other Islamic practices.

The mosque now attracts thousands of worshippers—most of them Palestinian-Americans—by offering pro-Palestinian sermons, a strict form of Islam and a freedom from›s and women who could mingle. The women wore white sleeves and did not cover their hair. The men sometimes ran liquor stores even though many Muslims believed Islam forbade selling alcohol.

While they wanted to succeed in America and fit into society, they also wanted a place of their own to practice their religion and hold on to their culture. But in all of Chicago, there was no real mosque or official religious leader for Arab Muslims.

In 1954, about 30 families from Beitunia, including Zayed's, decided that something needed to be done. They formed the Mosque Foundation and started raising money for a proper place of worship.

Zayid stepped forward to become the group's first prayer leader, holding services in a storefront. He had no formal Islamic training, but his brother, a religious man.

He became a justice of the peace so he could perform Muslim weddings. He learned to wash the dead in the Islamic tradition, cleansing the bodies with water, removing their clothes and dabbing them with perfume. He asked his brother back home to mail him the long

Jacket and call him up by word of mouth using codes.

Zayid could not drive, so his daughter Miriam shuttled him from house to house to ask for money to build a mosque. The women held bake sales and sold candy bars in front of grocery stores. The money trickled in.

Then, Zayid and the other immigrants started looking for property. They settled on Bridgeview, a village just southwest of Chicago with six Christian churches and plenty of inexpensive land.

There, Zayid and others drove down a bumpy dirt road to look at a piece of property, between a road and a water tower, in the shadow of heavy industry. Through his thick glasses, Zayid surveyed an empty lot covered with garbage.

After 19 years of work, this was all the Beitunia families could afford.

A new wave

Eventually, a mosque was built—but not because of the Beitunia immigrants, the bake sales and the candy bars.

"It took a new wave of immigrants. These people were more politically educated—doctors, not farmers; scientists, not salesmen. A few were Islamic scholars."

They were among the hundreds of thousands of Muslims immigrating to America in the 1960s and 1970s. Some had been uprooted by Israel's 1967 takeover of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, a traumatic defeat for Muslims that rippled through the Middle East. After facing such humiliations and living under oppressive Arab regimes, they increasingly turned to Islam for political strength.

When the new immigrants arrived in Chicago, they vowed to restart the Bridgeview mosque project by raising money from their fellow countrymen in the Middle East. Those promises helped them win election to the mosque board of directors, and by 1978 they led the building effort. The Beitunia families welcomed the newcomers' help.

One of the new leaders was a Palestinian named Omar Najib, who had studied in Egypt and earned a law degree at DePaul University. He frequently carried a briefcase and always wore a jacket and tie to prayers on Fridays, the holiest day of the week.

The 35-year-old Najib, the only Muslim lawyer mosque leaders knew, became the mosque's attorney and helped write its constitution. He also helped people file papers with officials.

The mosque leaders made major changes.

They removed Khalil Zayid as prayer leader and replaced him with someone who had more experience. Zaki Hamouda, a conservative Islamic scholar from Egypt. He quickly angered the congregation's women by chastising them for smoking.

Then the mosque leaders asked religious authorities in Jordan to send an assistant prayer leader. The authorities sent Masoud Ali Masoud, a 57-year-old Palestinian who worked for Jordan's religious affairs ministry.

He also belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood, a group that believed in spreading a strict form of Islam and creating states governed by Islamic law.

The Brotherhood had gained notoriety for repeatedly attempting to overthrow the Egyptian and Syrian governments. It spawned two violent Islamic
groups: the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, offshoots created by former Brotherhood members who believed the Brotherhood was not militant enough. And Brotherhood members would go on to form the militant Palestinian group Hamas, designated a terrorist group by the U.S. in 1995.

But the Brotherhood also organized political protests and run charities, and many supporters, including Masoud, saw the group as a peaceful movement aimed at restoring Islam’s greatness in the world. The Brotherhood did not operate openly in America, though its members quietly influenced some Muslim groups.

Soon, mosque leaders—adhering to a strict interpretation of Islam—told the congregation’s women to cover their hair and wear looser clothing. During social events, the women were separated from the men.

As the rift deepened between the two mosque factions, Najib, the lawyer, prepared documents that would turn the deed of the mosque over to the North American Islamic Trust. A non-profit organization based in Indiana, NAIT sought to help build and preserve mosques, often lending them money and taking title to their properties. The group would eventually hold the deeds to about 300 U.S. mosques—1 in 4 in the nation.

Najib argued that giving the mosque’s deed to NAIT would forever preserve the building as a mosque. He urged a group of old-timers—the American Arabian Ladies Society, which had gained part ownership of the mosque property through bake sales and other fundraisers—to sign on to the plan.

But the old-timers did not want the mosque turned over to an outside group with a growing reputation for fundamentalism. “We felt very bad,” recalled Siraya Shalabi, one of the Beitunia immigrants. “It was like a broken heart.”

Increasingly distressed, the Beitunia families decided to fight back.

Emotional conflict

The battle became emotional and violent. In November 1997, the police were called to the mosque when opponents of the new leadership allegedly surrounded and harassed the leaders. One foe threatened to put 30 silver bullets in the mosque president’s head, a mosque leader said in a letter to police.

Soon after, a meeting at a nearby restaurant turned into a fist fight. Another time, 30 opponents forced their way into the mosque in a dispute over whether they could hold a meeting there. One man allegedly wielded a knife.

An anonymous group of Beitunia sympathizers put out fliers. “Islam is our religion,” one said. “It is the Islam of flexibility and commitment to faith rather than fundamentalism and tension.”

Another flier alleged that “the essence of NAIT is the [Muslim] Brotherhood,” which had started its “deliberate and distorted means of dividing the community and tearing down what we have been attempting to build

Tribune photo by Chris Walker

Omar Najib, a former attorney for the Bridgeview mosque, prays in his storefront office in Palos Hills.
On Sept. 14, 2001, Sheik Jamal Said speaks to Muslims gathered for a prayer service in Bridgeview. He studied Islam in Saudi Arabia and has been prayer leader in Bridgeview for almost 19 years.
The grand jury investigation restarted, and the FBI reinterviewed mosque members, asking about Salah and others.

Federal officials also closed three Islamic charities operating near the mosque that were suspected of aiding terrorists. All three received donations from the mosque, and the head of one of the charities was a mosque director. No criminal terrorism charges were filed against the charities.

The government prevented another mosque director from returning home from Jordan. Authorities said that he was a security risk and that the south suburban organization he headed, the Islamic Association for Palestine, was part of Hamas' propaganda wing. No charges were filed against him or the organization.

Mosque President Oussama Jamal blasted the government actions as a witch hunt, saying a "Zionist agenda" was behind the moves. "The majority of Palestinians are living here in the south side of Chicago. That's why they are targeting us."

More than ever, the mosque community felt under siege. The day after the Sept. 11 attacks, a pro-American rally in nearby Oak Lawn turned into an angry march on the mosque. About 100 police officers were called to cordon off the area, keeping protestors two blocks away.

Many Muslim parents kept their children home from school the next day, and Sheik Jamal urged the women not to leave their houses.

In October, Chicago's top federal law-enforcement officials drove out to the mosque for an unusual town hall meeting. Five hundred people crowded into the basement, men on one side, women on the other. They listened as authorities explained that they were there simply to promote better relations with the community.

But when questioned, the officials made a statement that some in the audience found unsettling. They would neither confirm nor deny that they were investigating the mosque. To comment, the officials said, would violate government policy.

The mosque today

Most of the Beituna immigrants who had dreamed of their own mosque are now gone. The congregation's first prayer leader, Khalil Zayid, worshiped there until he died in 1988. He was never allowed to lead prayers at the new mosque.

Many of the early leaders' children attend other mosques or pray at home. Leila Diab, the daughter of a founder, rarely prays in Bridgeview. She said she tried to meet with Sheik Jamal several years ago, but he insisted that she cover her hair, and she refused.

"This face of Islam is not representative of Islam," she said. "It is very detestable to me."

Meanwhile, mosque attendance is booming. Friday prayers are so crowded that dozens cannot get inside, forcing them to place their prayer rugs on the front lawn. As many as 2,000 attend Friday prayers. Bridgeview remains one of the most popular of the Chicago area's 50 mosques.

Sheik Jamal and other mosque leaders still pursue a controversial agenda.

In March 2002, the mosque hired a new assistant prayer leader—the same man who had run the local office of an Islamic charity until it was closed by the federal government for alleged terrorism ties. Even a few board members questioned whether he should have been hired so
quickly.

At a prayer service last May, Sheik Jamal raised $50,000 for Palestinian activist Sami Al-Arian, a former professor at the University of South Florida who is charged with being the U.S. leader of Palestinian Islamic Jihad. To rally donors, the sheik called Israel "a foreign, malignant and strange element on the blessed land."

Al-Arian denies the charges against him. Oussama Jammal, the mosque president, defended the fundraising for Al-Arian. "We raised for his legal defense. That's allowed under U.S. law," he said. "If people were against this, they wouldn't have paid."

In December, at an Islamic conference in Chicago, Sheik Jamal said that Muslims should not listen to contemporary music and that women should not travel long distances without chaperones. He also praised Sayyid Qutb, whose writings helped lay the foundation for Muslim Brotherhood beliefs.

The mosque remains so conservative, several former leaders said, because more and more mosque officials are Brotherhood members.

Mosque leaders declined to comment on the Brotherhood, but director Bassam Jody noted that most of the mosque's 24 directors belong to the Muslim American Society—a group with strong ties to the Brotherhood. The mosque president runs the society's local chapter.

In an interview in Cairo, Brotherhood leader Mohammed Mahdi Akef said he and other Brotherhood members helped create the society and that it follows Brotherhood philosophy. The society said it is independent but influenced by the Brotherhood and other groups.

Sheik Jamal declined to be interviewed for this article. Several times in the past few months, he has told worshippers that those who criticize mosque leaders to outsiders are "hypocrites"—a condemnation that in Islam could cause someone to be shunned.

With the sheik setting the tone, the mosque community is more conservative than ever.

Many women believe that not even three hairs should show beneath a head scarf. Men and women are often separated at weddings. Many worshippers refuse to finance their homes with mortgages, believing that interest payments are banned in Islam.

Some mosque members worry that their children are being taught to reject American society. They also complain that the mosque remains focused on what goes on abroad at the expense of local issues, such as drugs and domestic abuse.

The mosque youth center, which once featured basketball games, is now a neglected building with broken windows. A sticker on a door advises, "Don't Get Caught Dead Without Islam," but the center was shut down last year because of building and fire code violations.

When Najib was mosque attorney in the 1980s, he believed that the newcomers would keep the mosque free of politics. Now he regrets ever representing them. "It was just plain blind stupid," he said.

He is uncomfortable with Sheik Jamal's social and political views, especially his calls for Islamic states.

Yet he still hopes the mosque will change. In April, he ran for a seat on the board, typing up his platform and handing it out to mosque members. It was the fifth time he had run.

Each time, he vowed to be a voice for the moderates. Each time, he lost.
for one-half of a century.

The Beituna faction began a whirlwind membership drive. They wanted to sign up hundreds of new members to force mosque officials to drop plans to align with NAIT.

But mosque leaders did not immediately accept new members, arguing that they had the authority to screen applicants to ensure that they were devout enough, court records show.

In the fall of 1981, the NAIT deal was signed. The same day, the mosque women's group sued to block the agreement. The women and their male supporters said the new leaders had deceived members about their true agenda.

"It is obvious that the board stole the mosque from its members," one filing said.

Najib represented the mosque in court. In filings, he said the lawsuit was based on a "personal and tribal vendetta." He argued that Najib was uneducated and could not read English and lacked the qualifications to be the mosque religious leader.

The case featured evidence rarely heard in a Chicago courtroom, including the mosque leadership's view of what made a good Muslim. Hammad, the mosque prayer leader, testified that if men missed more than three Friday prayers in a row without a valid excuse, they would no longer be considered Muslim.

After 26 days of testimony, a Cook County judge ruled in 1983 that the newcomers had not acted improperly. In a later hearing, he decreed that the case is simply a "bit of a factional dispute between two religious corporations."

Najib, the hard-liners, were now firmly in control.

Years of growth

Over the next dozen years, Muslims flocked to the Bridgeview mosque. In 1982, only 75 people went to Friday prayers. By 1993, 800 people would attend.

A whole new community sprang up. The area became an upscale enclave, featuring new houses with Arabic script over the doors and sparkling chandeliers.

Mosque leaders built two schools and started a youth center for basketball and religious classes. New clothing stores, groceries, and restaurants opened in Bridgeview. A floor-covering store turned into a Middle Eastern restaurant. A music store became an Islamic hair salon.

Men who attended the mosque grew their beards and traded their T-shirts for long tunics. Women draped themselves in loose, ankle-length robes.

Cook County was fast becoming home to more Palestinians than any other part of the nation. And the mosque was now one of the area's largest Islamic centers.

Village leaders knew little about Muslims and their religion. Bridgeview was populated mainly by Christians, and its trustees often referred to the mosque as "the Muslim church."

Most non-Muslims moved away from the mosque neighborhood, frustrated by traffic jams on Fridays and the call to prayer that rang out over mosque loudspeakers. Muslims were happy to take their places.

"It was convenient to live here," recalled Zakaria Khudeira, who moved in two blocks from the mosque. "You could dress the way you wanted. The children wouldn't be called names."

Some immigrants moved there to be near relatives. Some felt persecuted by the backlash against Muslims during the first Gulf War. Others wanted to protect their families from what they saw as the increasing immorality of American culture.

Jeanene Othman came to the mosque because of her oldest daughter. Othman worried about the second-grader's fitting in at a public school and enrolled her in one of the mosque Islamic schools. Othman, who had only prayed at home before, started attending the mosque and covering her hair.

"I started to understand that this was a way of life," she recalled. "For me, this mosque became a place of tranquility."

Still others joined the mosque because they liked the pro-Palestinian politics, sermons in Arabic and what they saw as its authentic interpretations of the Koran, the Muslim holy book.

"The community was serious about Islam," worshipper Seema Imam recalled. "It was easier to practice it if you're here."

But another major draw was the mosque's fiery, young religious leader, Jamal Said, known to worshipers as Sheikh Jamal.

The prayer leader

An imposing man with a bushy, brown beard, Sheikh Jamal mesmerized worshipers with his eloquent sermons and ardent pleas to help oppressed Muslims. He was greatly admired by mosque-goers, who frequently came to him with even everyday domestic disputes.

As a child, he was inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood. Growing up on the West Bank, he learned about a nearby graveyard for Brotherhood members who had died fighting for a Palestinian homeland. He later brought his own children to the cemetery to pay homage to the fighters, according to a tape of a speech he gave at a Muslim conference in 2000.

During the 1987 Arab-Israel war, his family moved to Jordan, where he would always maintain ties, eventually building a large house in an upscale neighborhood in the city.


Many at the mosque were already familiar with his views. As a guest speaker several years earlier, he had given a memorable sermon in which he criticized the mosque women for not dressing properly.

As prayer leader, he preached that America was a land of unbelievers, where families were not valued, according to mosque-goers. He told worshipers that they should not celebrate Valentine's Day and Thanksgiving because those were not Islamic holidays. He told teenage boys and girls not to mingle.

Over time, Sheikh Jamal developed a national reputation and easily attracted prominent Muslim activists to Bridgeview.

Abdullah Azzam, Osama bin Laden's spiritual mentor, visited the mosque in the mid-1980s as part of a national tour to support the U.S.-backed Afghan war against the Soviet Union. At least three Bridgeview men signed up.

Sheikh Jamal also raised money with skill, collecting as much
The mosque and several noted Islamic groups

The following organizations, tied to the Bridgeview mosque or its board members, have come under scrutiny from federal authorities. The groups and individuals have denied any connection to terrorism. None of the groups has been charged with terrorism-related crimes.

AL-AQSA EDUCATIONAL FUND
Mississippi: Mosque prayer leader Jamal Said was treasurer of the group in the mid-1990s. Its executive director, Abdelhaleem Ashqar, was described by the FBI as an activist for Hamas, a Palestinian militant group. Ashqar was indicted last year on charges of refusing to testify before a grand jury investigating Hamas fundraising.

BENEVOLENCE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION
Palos Hills, Ill.: The mosque gave the group more than $79,000 since 1993. The U.S. closed it in December 2001, alleging that it aided Al Qaeda and other militant groups. In addition to doing charity work, authorities charged leader Enam Alamoudi with aiding terrorists; he pleaded guilty last year, only to defrauding donors. He was sentenced to 11 years in prison.

GLOBAL RELIEF FOUNDATION
Bridgeview, Ill.: The mosque gave the foundation more than $120,000 since 1992. Top officials, Mohamed Chehadeh and the mosque board, were accused of funding Hamas and were arrested in Israel. The U.S. closed Global Relief in December 2001, alleging that it aided Al Qaeda, in addition to doing charity work.

HOLY LAND FOUNDATION FOR RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT
Texas: The mosque gave it more than $175,000 since 1991. The U.S. closed it in December 2001, alleging that it helped Hamas, in addition to doing charity work. The mosque then hired Kifah Mustapha, who had run the charity's local office.

ISLAMIC ASSOCIATION FOR PALESTINE
Oak Lawn, Ill.: Longtime mosque board member Rafeeq Sabri and Sabri Samirah have led the group. Samirah was prevented from returning to the U.S. last year because of an alleged risk to national security. Authorities have called the group part of Hamas. U.S. propaganda wing.

QUR'ANIC LITERACY INSTITUTE
Oak Lawn: Early mosque prayer leader Ahmad Zaki Hammad helped found the group, which allegedly sent money to Hamas with the help of mosque board member Muhammad Salah. Salah was accused of funding Hamas and was arrested in Israel. The U.S. seized bank accounts of the group and Salah in 1998; Salah is now a target of a federal grand jury investigation in Chicago.

Sources: Federal court records, state corporate filings, mosque annual reports and Tribune reporting
as $1 million in a year from worshippers. Most of the money was passed along to Muslim charities, which then sent it overseas, according to the mosque's annual reports.

His congregation was most willing to contribute to Palestinian causes. Many worshippers felt that America blindly supported Israel and ignored the plight of Palestinians. Some had fled the fighting or lost relatives in the ongoing conflict.

For many Palestinian Muslims throughout the world, the battle for a homeland had changed from a secular movement to an Islamic one. Sheik Jamal tapped into that philosophical switch, preaching in support of Palestinians.

He raised money at one national Islamic conference by asking people to donate in the memory of a Palestinian suicide bomber, according to his speech in 2000, taped by terrorism researcher Steven Emerson and translated by the Tribune.

Within the mosque itself, using violence to win a Palestinian homeland caused debate; not everyone supported suicide bombers or militant groups such as Hamas.

One of Sheik Jamal’s fellow mosque leaders, Muhammad Salah, drew scrutiny for his Palestinian fundraising activities. In 1993, while part of the mosque’s eight-member executive committee, Salah was arrested at a Gaza Strip checkpoint and accused of financing Hamas military operations. He was sent to an Israeli prison for five years.

In a statement to Israeli authorities that he later retracted, Salah said a religious leader in America recruited him into the Muslim Brotherhood, which led to his involvement in Hamas.

The man he named: Sheik Jamal.

Under scrutiny

With more and more questions being raised about Hamas fundraising, the mosque neighborhood turned into a surveillance site.

By the late 1990s, federal agents were knocking on doors, trading leads with investigators in other cities and flying to Israel to interview authorities. At FBI offices in Chicago, investigators hung on the wall a 30-foot-long chart listing the names of people and organizations nationwide believed to have ties to Hamas.

Muslims in Bridgeview complained that they were being treated unfairly. Rumors flew that FBI agents were spying on residents, cruising the neighborhood in unmarked cars.

Agents wanted to investigate the mosque itself, viewing it as a "gold mine" of information that could help their inquiry into terrorism financing, recalled Mark Flessner, the former prosecutor who led the investigation. But higher-ups at the Justice Department rejected probing the mosque. "The department was afraid of political controversy and backlash from Islamic groups," Flessner said.

Still, the government took several steps. A Chicago grand jury started hearing evidence about alleged Hamas fundraising. The government designated Salah a terrorist, seized his money and filed a lien against his home. Authorities also seized the bank accounts of the Oak Lawn religious group where Salah worked, the Quranic Literacy Institute, founded by Hammad, the former mosque prayer leader.

But no criminal charges were filed, and the investigation stalled. Only after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks did the government's interest in Hamas—and mosque leaders—pick up.
Struggle for the soul of Islam

From golden age to an embattled faith

Islam once was at forefront of civilization

By Stevenson Swanson
Tribune national correspondent

GRANADA, Spain—As the fiery orange sun sinks behind the mountains, the stones of the 800-year-old Alhambra take on a rosy glow. Against the backdrop of the snowcapped peaks of the Sierra Nevada, the fortress' rugged towers stand out in the gathering dusk.

As the lights of this long-ago capital of al-Andalus—Islamic Spain—blink to life, about 30 men kneel in neat rows inside a whitewashed mosque atop a hill facing the Alhambra. Palms held upward, they recite the evening prayers and bend forward until their heads touch the floor. Behind a thin screen, the shadowy outlines of the women of the mosque move in the same time-honored rhythms.

These two hilltop edifices represent the past and present faces of Islam.

The Alhambra fortress, which the Moorish rulers of southern Spain began to construct in 1238, recalls the splendor and achievements of the golden age of Islam, when the youngest of the three great monotheistic religions held sway from the Straits of Gibraltar in the west to the banks of the Indus River in the east.

Across the ravine, the humble mosque, whose plain white walls and red tile roof make it virtually indistinguishable from its neighbors, testifies to the renewed vigor of Islam, a fast-growing religion with a worldwide membership of about 1.2 billion, including 2 million to 4 million in America, although some Muslim groups put the figure at 7 million.

It is the first new mosque in Granada in more than 500 years, yet its opening in July came at a time of profound questioning about the meaning and direction of Islam. The Koran, Islam's holy book, preaches peace and charity, but to some Western ears, the loudest voices in the Muslim world extol hate and violence.

Islam is hardly unique as a religion that has been twisted to justify killing. Historical circumstances help explain how terrorists have commandeered Islam as their cause. Unlike some religions, Islam does not have a clearly defined hierarchy to pronounce authoritatively on matters of doctrine and interpretation. Backed by radical imams, Islamic militants can claim that their interpretation of Islamic teachings is at least as valid as others. Also, Islam recognizes no separation between church and state. That makes it easy for terrorists to cloak their political causes—over Palestine or the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia—in religious rhetoric. And the concept of jihad, which signifies much more than holy war, provides another convenient cover for killers and suicide bombers.

But scholars who have studied Islam and terrorism say none of these factors would matter if the Islamic world were not still suffering from a centuries-old crisis of confidence, born of the loss of its place at the forefront of world civilization.

"A conquering civilization doesn't have terrorism," said Seyed Hossein Nasr, professor of Islamic studies at George Washington University. "The conquered have terrorism. If you look on the map, the question of Palestine, of Kashmir, of the southern Philippines, of Chechnya, they are all places where Muslims are trying to protect their land or their culture, and they are losing. They only have recourse to these horrible means."

Islam's current sense of itself as an embattled faith stands in stark contrast to its past. For at least 500 years, the Islamic world was the driving force in human development. While Europe struggled to emerge from the chaos left by the collapse of the Roman Empire, Muslim scientists, engineers and architects were the most advanced in the world, and Muslim rulers nurtured a cosmopolitan culture that was often remarkably tolerant of the Jews and Christians who lived in its midst.

The youngest of the three closely related faiths that believe in one god, Islam was born in the unpromising desert landscape of the Arabian Peninsula.

In 610, a 40-year-old businessman was on a monthlong spiritual retreat on Mt. Hira, near the Arabian city of Mecca, when the archangel Gabriel appeared to him and uttered the command, "Iqra"—"Recite."

God's words began to pour from the man's mouth. Over the next 22 years, Muhammad ibn Abdullah received many such revelations, which his followers later wrote down, forming the Koran.

Christian and Jewish readers of the Koran are struck by the familiar names they encounter: Adam, Eve, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus all figure into Muhammad's
A father and son walk to prayer through the courtyard at Al Azhar Mosque in Cairo on the last Friday of Ramadan last year.
Early Islam
From its modest beginnings in the Arabian desert, Islam has grown into one of the world's great religions.

A RELIGION
About 570 Muhammad ibn Abdullah is born in Mecca.

610 According to Islam, Muhammad is visited by the archangel Gabriel in a cave and begins receiving the revelations that will form the basis of the Koran.

622 Persecuted by the people of Mecca, Muhammad and his followers move to Yathrib (later renamed Medina), where he establishes an Islamic state based on the revelations. This marks Year 1 of the Muslim calendar.

630 Muhammad and his followers return to Mecca and take control of the city, destroying pagan idols. They begin consolidating power in the Arabian Peninsula.

632 Muhammad dies in Medina. His confidant, Abu-Bakr, becomes the new leader of Islam.

644 Muslim forces control the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and most of Iraq.

661 The Caliph Ali is killed. Disputes over whether he and his descendants are the rightful successors to Muhammad later lead to a split between Sunni and Shiite Muslims.

AN EMPIRE
661 The Umayyad dynasty begins a period of rapid expansion, to Spain in the west and India to the east. Islamic arts and architecture flourish in this period. Damascus becomes the empire's capital.

- Islamic world in 634
- Islamic world in 756

732 Muslim expansion in the west is halted in southern France.

A CIVILIZATION
8th Century Muslim religious scholars begin translating Greek writings. In the coming centuries, Greek science writings will form the basis for Muslim advances in astronomy, mathematics, and medicine.

750 The Abbasid dynasty ushers in a period of strong centralized government with patronage of the arts and sciences. Later, provincialism increases.

762 Baghdad becomes the capital of the empire and soon a major center of learning, attracting Jews and Christians as well as Muslims.

1099 Christian crusaders from Europe capture Jerusalem. The Muslims retake it a century later.

1258 Mongols from the east capture Baghdad, ending Abbasid rule. Muslim kingdoms elsewhere continue to flourish.

1453 The rise of the Ottoman Empire, based in Istanbul, restores unity to much of the Muslim world. After the death of Suleiman I in 1566, the empire settles into a long, slow period of decline.

1492 Christian forces conquer Granada, ending Muslim rule of Spain. The same year, Christopher Columbus discovers the New World.

1526 The Mughal dynasty, founded by Babur, begins rule over India that lasts until 1857.

Mid-18th Century
Wahhabism, a movement toward a more puritanical form of Islam, is founded on the Arabian Peninsula by Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab and adopted by Saudi leaders.
Into nationhood

The waning of Islamic empires brought about new Muslim nations and new political struggles.

**COLONIALISM**

1798 Napoleon invades Egypt, paving the way for an era of European colonialism in the Muslim world during the 19th and early 20th Centuries.

1830 France colonizes Algeria.

1882 British rule over Egypt begins.

**STATEHOOD**

**Early 20th Century**

The demise of the Ottoman Empire after World War I is followed by a slow end to colonialism in the Muslim world and the founding of itary nation-states there.

- British controlled after WWI
- French controlled after WWI

1923 The Turkish republic is declared. Kemal Ataturk, as its first president, draws a line between Islam and a secular government.

1928 The Muslim Brotherhood is formed as a religious and philanthropic organization. It later becomes a powerful and militant advocate for Islamic-style governmental reform throughout the Muslim world.

1948 The formation of the state of Israel is immediately followed by a war with surrounding Arab countries. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians become refugees, while hundreds of thousands of Jews in Arab countries flee to Israel.

**RESISTANCE**

1954 Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser bans the Muslim Brotherhood after a failed assassination attempt against him.

1964 The Palestine Liberation Organization is formed in Cairo.

1967 Israel defeats Egypt, Jordan and Syria in the Six-Day War, capturing the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golian Heights, Sinai Peninsula and East Jerusalem.

1979 Under mounting pressure, the Shah of Iran is forced to abdicate, leading to the return from exile of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Iran becomes an Islamic republic, the first of its kind in modern times. Also, the Soviet Union invades Afghanistan. U.S.-supported Muslim rebels called mujahedeen battle the occupiers for most of the next decade before expelling them.

1980 Iraq invades Iran, kicking off a bloody eight-year war.

1982 Israel invades Lebanon in a bid to force out the PLO. The resulting occupation gives rise to the Syrian-backed Shiite militia group Hezbollah.

1990s-present Tensions between authoritarian leaders and opposition groups, including religious extremists, in Muslim countries continue to mount. U.S. support of Israel and regimes like Saudi Arabia makes the U.S. a target of extremists. Terrorist attacks, most notably those on Sept. 11, 2001, bring increased scrutiny of fundamentalist Islam.

Sources: Encyclopedia Britannica; "The World's Religions: Understanding the Living Faiths"; "Islam: Faith, Culture, History" by Paul Lunde; Aqib Nizamuddin, professor of Religion at Emu.'s 1st College; World Book - Chicago Tribune/Adam Zoll
Great leap forward

The conquest of the eastern Mediterranean gave Muslim scholars access to the written legacy of the ancient world. The works of Aristotle, Plato and other Greeks would serve as the springboard for Arabic science's great leap forward.

"Within about 150 years, they had translated the whole of Greek science into Arabic," said Peters, author of "Islam: A Guide for Jews and Christians.

"Talk about technology transfer: They just sucked the technological gut out of it and then assimilated it enough to begin to build on it."

Starting in the 9th Century, the Islamic world was the center of scientific discovery for at least 500 years. Arab astronomers plotted star locations to fractions of a degree, Islamic mathematicians pioneered a new field called algebra. Muslim physicians were the first to use scalpel to close incisions.

Not just Islamic scientists and writers flourished in this era. Jewish and Christian intellectuals shared in the achievements; the great Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides, born in Islamic Spain, wrote almost all of his major works in Arabic.

Left behind

But with the coming of the Renaissance in 14th Century Italy, the prophet's religion was about to be eclipsed. A resurgent Europe soon raced ahead of the Islamic world.

Exactly why Islam did not keep up with the West is a matter of continued, scholarly debate, but one often-cited reason is Muslims' relative lack of interest in Europe and, later, America. They viewed the West as a backward hinterland of barbarians best-known for their largely ineffective attacks on the Holy Land in the Crusades during the Middle Ages.

"It was a judgment that had for long been reasonably accurate," Middle East expert Bernard Lewis said in "What Went Wrong?: The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East." "It was becoming dangerously out of date."

The Renaissance, the Reformation and the scientific revolution of the 17th Century "passed virtually unnoticed in the land of Islam," Levy wrote.

Through the long centuries of

Expansion, fissures

By the time of his death in 632, Muhammad had won believers in much of present-day Saudi Arabia. His successors vastly expanded the borders of Islam, conquering Egypt, Palestine, Syria, North Africa and present-day Iraq and Iran. So rapid was Islam's growth that in 711, 101 years after Muhammad received the first revelation, an Islamic army invaded Spain.

And yet, within the first century of Islam's growth, the first important fissure in the new religion also appeared. Following Muhammad's death, the leadership of the Islamic community passed to a series of his closest companions and only later to his closest male relative, his cousin and son-in-law Ali.

A minority of Muslims, who became known as Shiites, believe that Ali and his descendants were the rightful successors of Muhammad. The majority, known as Sunnis, accept that the prophet's companions took over after his death.

This division is the most important but hardly the only split among Muslims, mirroring the spectrum of conservative, moderate and liberal sects within Christianity and Judaism.

As Islamic rulers took control of the Middle East, they devised laws—called dhimma—that allowed non-Muslims to practice their religion, in keeping with the Koran's teachings that Jews and Christians should be accepted as ahli al kitab—people of the book.
Islam’s influence is far-reaching

Majority-Muslim countries span the globe, from West Africa to Southeast Asia. Worldwide there are more than 1 billion Muslims, most in non-Arab nations. Wherever Islam is practiced, its five most important principles are observed.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

الشهداء

Bearing witness (shahadda)
This is considered the most important pillar in that the others follow from it. It entails a profession of faith often translated as “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his messenger.”

صلاة

Prayer (salat)
Muslims pray five times a day—at dawn, noon, midafternoon, evening and night—and always facing Mecca.

صدقة

Almsgiving (zakat)
Muslims are required to give 2.5 percent of their wealth to charity.

صيام

Fasting (sawm)
During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn to sundown.

حج

Pilgrimage (hajj)
Every Muslim who can afford it is expected to journey to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime.

THE MODERN MUSLIM WORLD

Percent Muslim population (with other notable countries)

- 26% to 50%
- 51% to 75%
- 76% or more

Note: Estimates of the U.S. Muslim population run from 2 million to 7 million.
Sources: Statesman's Yearbook 2003, World Book, CIA World Fact Book

Chicago Tribune/Adam Zoll and Chris Sopeyeh
decline, Muslims adopted various approaches to try to catch up with the West. After World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Kemal Ataturk established the officially secular state of Turkey, an attempt to reproduce the West's separation of church and state.

That idea is novel in Islamic societies, in part because Muhammad himself was not only a prophet but also a ruler; first in Medina and later in Mecca. "In Islam, it is God, and not the people who listens to government legitimacy," Karen Armstrong, a noted religion scholar, wrote in "Islam: A Short History.

On the other hand, some Muslims have taken an approach diametrically opposed to that of Ataturk and other secularists. The answer, they say, is to reform the faith, purifying it of later accretions that prevent Muslims from achieving the perfect Islam or surrendering to God, of Muhammad and his earliest followers.

Among many movements of this type, one of the most consequential for the modern world began in the mid-18th century, when Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab attracted followers by calling for a radical reform of the religion. The idea, Abd al-Wahhab declared, was to recreate the pure faith of the first Muslims in the 7th century.

In practice, that meant not only following Muhammad's injunctions to pray five times daily, fast during Ramadan and make the pilgrimage to Mecca, but also punishing thieves by cutting off their hands and other measures that strike many Westerners as draconian.

Wahhabism was adopted by the Saudi dynasty, and, since the establishment of the modern kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the early 20th century, this exceptionally conservative form of Islam has been the official religion of the state. It has also been a beneficiary of Saudi largess, which has funded Wahhabi efforts to win more converts throughout the Muslim world.

To Americans, the most infamous Wahhabi is Osama bin Laden, the extremist leader of the terrorist network Al Qaeda, which is blamed for the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Bin Laden, a Saudi, harbors deep hatred for America, in part for stationing troops in Saudi Arabia during and after the Persian Gulf war in 1991. For bin Laden and his followers, the presence of infidel troops in the country that contains the two holiest places in Islam—Mecca and Medina—is an affront to the faith.

Wahhabism is an example of a fundamentalist movement, a development that has surfaced in other monotheistic religions. Some Christians and Jews seek to renew their religions by returning to the roots of their faiths. And some Christians and Jews, like some Muslims, transform their zeal into violence and become religious terrorists.

"All three religions can be used to 'justify, in the terrorists' minds, terrorism and violence,'" said Jessica Stern, a Harvard University lecturer and author of "Terror in the Name of God," which examines the sources of religious violence in the three monotheistic faiths. "If you look at the Old Testament, it's very violent. If you're looking for violence, you can find it."

An important common denominator among religious terrorists is a sense of humiliation, Stern said. For Muslims, that can mean many things, from Israel's defeat of nations in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War to the corruption and unemployment poverty of most Middle Eastern countries, which stand in stark contrast to the thriving economies of other parts of the developing world, such as the Far East.

Jihad and martyrs

Muslim "terrorists" have already come to explain their actions—jihad—which most non-Muslims think means "holy war."

In fact, jihad means struggle, and Muslim tradition says Muhammad distinguished between two types of jihad. The greater struggle is within oneself to resist evil or within the Muslim community to reform error. The lesser form of jihad, according to the prophet, is warfare against infidels, which Muslim scholars have argued should be waged under strictly defined conditions, one of which calls for sparing noncombatants, such as women and children.

But the Koran can be contradictory on many matters, including jihad. "Slay the idolaters wherever ye find them," reads one verse, seemingly an open invitation to wage war. Other verses counsel avoiding jihad, including one that calls for patience in dealing with non-Muslims: "Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way."

The argument for a modern-day jihad against the West finds its philosophical foundation in the work of an Egyptian writer, Sayyid Qutb, who lived briefly in America and saw the separation of religion and state as the root of the West's moral decadence. The West, he argued, had inflicted its ills on Muslims through colonization, and the only cure was the establishment of a pure Islamic state. Qutb's radical vision, a core tenet of the Muslim Brotherhood, was anathema to a secular ruler like Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, who ordered Qutb's execution in 1966.

The Brotherhood spread its beliefs across the Muslim world, despite government crackdowns, and Qutb's anti-Western positions have become articles of faith among Islamic terrorists, especially Al Qaeda. Lack of large armies to fight conventional battles, Al Qaeda and similar organizations have resorted to suicide missions to spread terror, a tactic that would seem to be forbidden by
dark-eyed virgins called *houris.*

This vision of what awaits a martyr gives militant extremists such as bin Laden a powerful inducement to recruit new jihadis, or warriors, to carry out their one-way missions.

**Status of Islam**

This small minority of Muslims has caused many in America and Europe to regard Islam with fear and suspicion. Some American Muslims were the victims of anti-Muslim violence in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, and the government detained or deported hundreds of Muslims, a move civil liberties groups decried.

Extremists such as Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, the mastermind behind the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, and Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, a cleric serving a life sentence for plotting to blow up several New York landmarks, have found adherents in America, but a 2001 survey found that 70 percent of American Muslims strongly agreed that Muslims should participate in American institutions and the political process.

Although most American Muslims bring their faith with them from their native lands, as many as 30 percent of Muslims in the U.S. are converts.

In Europe, Muslim immigrants are also facing scrutiny and coming into conflict with authorities over such issues as the height of minarets at mosques or, as in France, the wearing of the *hijab,* or head scarf, in schools.

As a small step toward making Islam less threatening, the leaders of the new mosque in Granada have decided to leave the curtains of the mosque’s prayer room open during services. Drawn by the mosque’s stunning view of the Alhambra, crowds of curious onlookers peer at the men of the mosque as they bow toward Mecca.

"I think it is very necessary that Western people should have firsthand knowledge of how Muslims really live and believe," said Abdalhassib Castiñeira, the director of the foundation that built the mosque.

"This is one little service that we can render to clarify these ideas that people have about Islam, mainly negative notions."
How Saudi wealth fueled holy war

Charity leader funded fighters to spread and defend Islam

A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Saudi Arabia is the heart and soul of Islam. Muslims face the sacred city of Mecca in the desert kingdom when they pray. But the nation plays another role in the Islamic world. It is a powerful financial engine that has generated billions of dollars that flow into mosques and Islamic communities from Cairo to Chicago.

Much of the money funneled through charities and foundations finances health care, food for the needy, mosque construction and many good deeds that can help win converts to Islam.

But some of this cash also finances wars and a militant strain of Islam, one that advocates rigid adherence to a conservative brand of the religion and that often scorns the West and moderate Muslims. Sometimes, the dividends of this investment can be violent and divisive.

In this second part of a continuing series, Tribune reporters show how a Saudi businessman who set up a major charitable operation in suburban Chicago has helped finance one side in the struggle for the soul of Islam.

Charity leader funded fighters to spread and defend Islam

JIDDAH, Saudi Arabia — Muslim forces were gathering near a small town in Bosnia, and commanders were moving fighters to the front. The man in charge wanted the very best soldiers available, so he handpicked six of his favorites and ordered them to the area immediately.

The mission was indisputably military, but the man calling the shots was not a captain with the army or a general back at command headquarters. He was the person helping finance the battle: Adel Batterjee, a wealthy Saudi businessman aiding the operation 2,000 miles away from his home in Saudi Arabia.

This was not the only battleground in which Batterjee played a major role. During the past two decades, he has financed Muslim fighters in some of the world’s most volatile areas, including Afghanistan, Chechnya and Sudan. And he has done so with the help of U.S. citizens, establishing a major charitable operation just outside Chicago to collect donations to fulfill his dream of creating Islamic states and spreading Islam around the globe.

Batterjee stands at the forefront of one of the great religious movements of our time. Since Saudi Arabia’s oil boom in the 1970s, wealthy Saudis have poured billions of dollars into Islamic causes worldwide. They have constructed hundreds of mosques, funded thousands of Islamic schools and distributed millions of Korans.

Much of what the Saudi money has done in the name of the world’s fastest-growing religion is admirable and within the bounds of mainstream philanthropy. But in the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001, with 15 of the 19 hijackers proving to be Saudi citizens, questionable practices by Saudi charities have come to light—practices such as Batterjee’s use of charitable dollars to fund Islamic military operations.

Also of concern, and not only to Westerners, is the ultraconservative brand of Islam that the Saudis embrace and often seek to export. Some Muslim organizations have gone so far as to refuse Saudi money on the grounds that they do not...
Adel Batterjee (center, shown in Afghanistan in a photo from his 1993 book) has financed Muslim fighters in several nations.
ISLAM
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

accept the Saudi version of Islam.

The United States has frozen the U.S. assets of two Saudi religious organizations, including Batterjee's, because of suspected links to terrorism.

Even Saudi Arabia itself, a highly insular society, has publicly cracked down on its 240 charities. For decades, the Saudis sent money abroad with little oversight, but after Sept. 11 and subsequent terrorist attacks on its own soil, the kingdom has taken unprecedented steps to rein in charitable donations and other activities that might be linked to terrorism.

The Saudis have arrested 600 terrorism suspects, removed dozens of preachers for extremism, restricted the flow of donations overseas and even banned a tradition central to Saudi identity: the collection of alms in mosques.

Today, the practices of the charities remain largely mired in ambiguity, with extensive investigations by U.S. authorities finding only sketchy evidence of wrongdoing and no proof that Saudi money financed the Sept. 11 hijackings. For many Muslims, the inquiries are just further indication that America's war on terrorism is unfairly targeting Islamic groups.

Drawing on court, charity and intelligence documents, the Tribune has detailed the rise and fall of Batterjee's charity. Benevolence International Foundation, providing insight into how Saudi charities work, the power they wield in spreading Islam and how one used its assets to wage war.

The tale of Batterjee's organization, which closed in 2002, spans 20 years, four continents and many battles.

At Batterjee's side was Esaam Arnaout, a passionate and shrewd man whose job was to run the day-to-day operations of the charity without tipping off authorities. In pursuit was star federal prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald, who had vowed not to personally try a case for a year but changed his mind and went after Batterjee's charity.

Batterjee, who declined to be interviewed for this report, advocates armed confrontation in the name of Islam—not just to defend the religion but to spread it as well.

In a book he published in 2002, portions of which were translated by the Tribune, he writes that "the pinnacle of Islam" is jihad, which he defines as use of force for religious purposes. Muslims, he states, are in a "vicious confrontation" with their enemies, including the Jews, the Christians, the Hindus and idol worshipers from the East and West.

Such views are controversial among Muslims, reflecting the growing debate over Islam's place in the modern world and the role of militants in shaping the religion.

New power brokers

On a Wednesday night in Jiddah, a bustling port along the Red Sea, thousands of customers filled the Hera mall, one of the city's modern shopping centers. Teenage girls chatted on cell phones, families crowded into the food court and young Saudis, Egyptians and Jordanians lined up at Starbucks.

Also present were the mutawain, or the religious police. Five of them—three in long white robes and two in brown police uniforms—slowly patrolled the mall corridors, looking for unmarried couples talking, women not properly covered by the traditional black gown and stores not shutting promptly at prayer time.

When a middle-aged woman walked out of a jewelry store with her hair partially uncovered, the police quickly encircled her. Looking annoyed, the woman adjusted her black scarf and moved on.

Such contradictions abound in Jiddah—Adel Batterjee's hometown—and in Saudi Arabia as a whole. The nation offers all the comforts and conveniences of modern life but with the strict religious rules and tribal
traditions of centuries past. Women are not allowed to drive, but they can become doctors. Record stores sell American rap music, but authorities use felt-tip pens to black out women's shoulders, legs and cleavage on each CD cover.

Though many Saudis are fabulously wealthy, many others are poor and live in drab apartment buildings. A volatile oil market and a population boom have dropped the per capita income to only $7,000.

Religion, more than anything, defines Saudi life. The country is home to Islam's two holiest sites, Mecca and Medina, where Islam's prophet, Muhammad, lived in the 7th Century. Muslims face Mecca when they pray, and a basic tenet of Islam is that all Muslims should try to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once.

Islam is not just the dominant religion in Saudi Arabia; all others are banned. Most Saudis follow the orthodox teachings of Muhammad ibn Abdel-Wahhab, an 18th Century religious reformer who wanted to cleanse Islam of impurities and return to the "true" teachings of the prophet. This called for no drinking, dancing or music.

For much of the past 100 years, the people of Saudi Arabia and their religious practices attracted little notice in the world. The nation was a vast desert, with few paved roads, or homes with electricity, or goods to trade, except for camels and dates.

Then, in 1938, oil was discovered—the largest known reserves in the world.

The Saudis launched a major modernization effort, constructing schools, highways, apartments and hotels. Entire towns rose from the desert, and by 1973, Saudi Arabia was synonymous with wealth. That year, it and other Arab nations imposed an oil embargo that doubled oil prices and plunged the West into an energy crisis.

But even as the Saudis were being recognized—and reviled—in the West as the world's new power brokers, they were quietly pursuing another path to influence: They were using their newfound wealth to spread Islam around the world.

In the Chicago area alone, the Saudis were helping build mosques in Northbrook and Bridgeview and helping establish the American Islamic College on the North Side and the East-West University on South Michigan Avenue.

But it was in Afghanistan where Saudi money had a profound global impact. When Soviet tanks rolled into the Muslim nation in the winter of 1979, the Saudi government began funneling billions of dollars to the front to repel the communist invaders.

A wealthy Saudi businessman named Osama bin Laden also aided the Muslim fighters, as did the U.S. government, which contributed several billion dollars in weapons. President Ronald Reagan called the Muslim soldiers "freedom fighters."

Among the first journalists to report on the fighters was Jamal Khashoggi, a young Saudi working at a daily newspaper in Jiddah. One day, a dignified-looking man came to the reporter's office and said he enjoyed his stories. He wondered whether the reporter would like an inside tour of the Afghan war zone.

"Come with me, and you'll get some scoops," he said.

The man was philanthropist Adel Batterjee.

Joining the fight

The Batterjee name was well-known in Jiddah, as the family owned a wide variety of businesses: health-care companies, a computer firm, an ice cream factory. One business, Saudi German Hospitals, was on a long boulevard called Batterjee Street. The family was also politically connected. Adel Batterjee's uncle was Hisham Nazer, the Saudi planning minister who would go on to become the country's influential oil minister.

Like many wealthy Saudis, Adel Batterjee left home as a teenager to study in America. He enrolled at the University of Kansas and graduated in 1968.
Muslims pray in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, during hajj. One of the basic tenets of Islam is that worshipers should try to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetimes.
in from Saudi Arabia to oversee operations. "He was completely consumed by the Afghan jihad," Khashoggi recalled.

As a charity leader, Batterjee, then in his early 40s, commanded respect. Many employees called him "Abu Malik," a term of honor; while some of his workers ironed his clothes and addressed him only when spoken to first.

One young mujahed who admired Batterjee was Eanam Arnaout, a Syrian who was drawn to Muslim causes ever since his older brother, a noted Islamic militant, was gunned down by Syrian police in 1980.

The young fighter met Batterjee one day when Arnaout picked him up at the Islamabad airport and drove him to Peshawar. Batterjee liked the way Arnaout drove, so he offered him a job at his charity.

It was the start of a long relationship.

The Mountain Camp

For Batterjee, waging jihad involved more than taking on superpowers. It also entailed mundane tasks and headaches: Did the fighters have coats? Was a new car needed?

These were the day-to-day details the Saudi financier often confronted, particularly at a remote training center he financed in Afghanistan called the Mountain Camp, according to records provided to the Tribune by French terrorism researcher Jean-Charles Brisard.

Batterjee's camp opened about 1980, shortly after Muslim forces drove the Soviets out of Afghanistan. But then the Muslims began fighting each other for control of the country, splitting into seven guerrilla factions.

Batterjee sided with the most anti-Western faction, the Party of Islam, headed by fundamentalist warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The U.S. government also aided Hekmatyar, hoping he could help rid the country of the remnants of Soviet influence.

With the help of Batterjee's charity, Hekmatyar's guerrillas established the camp to train the guerrillas. It consisted of tents for about 150 fighters, an infirmary, a mosque and a bakery.

Chosen to oversee this was Atty. Gen. John Ashcroft and U.S. Atty. Patrick Fitzgerald (right) announce charges against Eanam Arnaout in 2002 in Chicago.

Eanam Arnaout—the young Syrian driver Batterjee liked so well. When the camp needed money for supplies, Arnaout or other leaders would phone or write Batterjee in Saudi Arabia.

In one letter, Arnaout asked Batterjee to send $20,000 and to talk with the new recruits coming from Saudi Arabia. "Please remind the brothers to purchase shoes and jackets from your location," he told Batterjee, "because they will be going to very cold regions."

During a particularly troubled week in which fighters quarreled with the cooks and three soldiers deserted, Batterjee came to inspect the troops, stayed a few hours, then left.

Over time, Batterjee became disheartened with the Afghan civil war, which pitted Muslim against Muslim, Khashoggi recalled. "He didn't want to be part of that butchering," he said.

Fed up, the Saudi financier decided to quit Afghanistan.

Billions of dollars

The financial system that allowed Saudi philanthropists such as Batterjee to do their work was vast, complex and extremely well-funded.

Billions of Saudi charitable dollars changed hands, with the money originating from a variety of sources, including the king himself, thousands of members of the royal family, numerous millionaires and millions of average Saudis. Most of these people donated for religious reasons, fulfilling the Islamic requirement that Muslims give 2.5 percent of their annual net worth to charity.

But for the oil-rich Saudi royal family, the motives for giving were also political. Donating generously to Islamic causes abroad not only increased the kingdom's stature in the world but also helped win allies against periodic threats to the Saudi crown.

The Saudis feared that the Soviets would encroach on Middle East oil fields; that the push for a secular, pan-Arab nation in the 1980s would spell the end of monarchies; that the revolution sweeping Iran in the 1970s would hurt Saudi Arabia's bid to become Islam's worldwide voice; and that religious zealots within the kingdom would try to overthrow the Saudi government.

To gain control over the mounting charitable donations, Saudi government officials became heads of some of the charities. Other groups, such as Batterjee's, remained private ventures.

When the money was distributed abroad, it often went to needy Muslims in nations at war. But some funds went to those who simply asked. When a Muslim student organization in America wanted to save a fiv...
Children study at an orphanage near Kabul, Afghanistan, that was supported by Benevolence International Foundation.
Saudi philanthropist’s aid to Muslim fighters

Adel Batterjee, a wealthy businessman in Saudi Arabia, founded a charity in the mid-1980s that became Benevolence International Foundation. The charity has provided food, shelter and medicine for needy Muslims around the world. It also has supported Muslim fighters in several nations, according to documents and interviews.

**ADEL BATTERJEE**

**Age:** 58

**Profession:** Businessman, author and philanthropist

**Home:** Jiddah, Saudi Arabia

- He has been an outspoken supporter of creating Islamic states—by force, if necessary.
- The U.S. froze the charity’s assets in December 2001, citing suspected links to terrorism, and Benevolence closed its doors several months later. The charity has denied any links to terrorism.

**BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA**

1990s: During the Bosnian war, Batterjee’s charity gives military supplies to the Black Swans, an elite Islamic unit of the Bosnian army. The charity also helps transport Muslim fighters from Afghanistan to Bosnia and flies injured soldiers to Saudi Arabia to be treated at a Batterjee family-owned hospital.

1992: Batterjee handpicks several soldiers for battle.

**CHECHNYA**

Mid-1990s: The charity establishes operations with the help of Batterjee’s contacts with a top Islamic leader. The charity provides uniforms and anti-mine boots to Chechen rebels fighting the Russians.

1998: The charity hires Saif ul Islam to run its Chechnya operations. He is described by the U.S. government as a high-ranking Al Qaeda military commander, but he has not been charged.

**AFGHANISTAN**

1980s: During the Afghan-Soviet war, Batterjee and Osama bin Laden are among the top fundraisers for Muslim fighters, documents indicate.

Early 1990s: During the Afghan civil war, Batterjee helps finance the Mountain Camp, an Islamic military training center where he also inspects troops.

**Sources:** Tribune reporting, court records

Chicago Tribune
cially strapped mosque in Gary, Ind., the group appealed to the Saudi king and secured the necessary aid.

The Saudis would eventually help establish at least 1,500 mosques abroad. They would also aid 2,000 Islamic schools, sponsor summer camps for children, supplement the salaries of many prayer leaders and spend millions of dollars on Muslim research centers and endowed teaching positions at some of the world’s top universities, including Harvard and Oxford.

So much money went out, from so many Saudi sources, that even Saudi leaders did not know how much was spent and exactly who was on the receiving end. Estimates on the total would be put in the tens of billions.

And while the Saudis would insist that strings were not attached to their giving, some Muslim groups would think otherwise.

Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina would become upset when the Saudis tried to impose dress codes. The mosque in Northbrook, the Islamic Cultural Center of Greater Chicago, would reluctantly halt coed folk dancing in the basement, partly because of Saudi complaints. And the American Society of Muslims, the 1.5 million-member African-American group based in Chicago, would quit taking Saudi money because of unacceptable demands.

“They wanted to tell me what to teach in the schools and what to use as curriculum,” recalled W. Deen Mohammed, its former head of the association. “Our leaders won’t accept that.”

Others would assail the Saudis for publishing hate-filled books. One religious encyclopedia, published by a Saudi charity called Jews “humanity’s enemies; they foment immorality in this world.”

Over time, the Saudis’ free-wheeling spending and strident beliefs made the kingdom vulnerable to criticism that it was systematically encouraging Islamic extremism.

And that made someone like Batterjee an increasingly logical target.

Ominous problems

When a despondent Batterjee left Afghanistan, it was by no means the end of his support for jihad. From 1992 to 2000, his charity collected twice as much in donations, opened offices in 10 nations and moved into several regions where Muslims were at war.

Bosnia-Herzegovina was the focus of this rapid growth, with Batterjee taking on a clear military role.

Beginning in 1992, after Bosnia declared independence from Yugoslavia, Serb nationalists started expelling and killing Bosnian Muslims and Croats in what became known as ethnic cleansing. Newspaper photographs of starving Muslims in concentration camps evoked images of the Holocaust and sparked worldwide outrage.

Like other Islamic charities, Batterjee’s group helped Muslim refugees and orphans. But it also provided boots, uniforms and kid-talkies to units of the Bosnian army, including the Black Swans, an elite Islamic fighting force that prayed daily and barred alcohol and swearing.

On one occasion, U.S. government filings state, Batterjee handpicked six fighters and ordered them sent from Croatia into neighboring Bosnia.

Overseeing the charity’s operations in Bosnia was a familiar figure: Enaam Arnaout, Batterjee’s right-hand man. He helped transport many Arab men pouring into the Balkans to join the fight. Some injured fighters were flown all the way to Jiddah to be treated at Saudi German Hospitals, run by the Batterjee family.

With Batterjee’s charity growing, he increasingly looked to America for money. In 1992, he decided to open a fundraising office in the Chicago area, home to several hundred thousand Muslims. He filed state incorporation papers and changed the name of his charity to Benevolence International Foundation.

But with rapid growth came problems, some of them ominous.

In the spring of 1993, as part of a wider crackdown on extremists, Saudi authorities brought Batterjee in for questioning and closed his charity’s headquarters in Jiddah.

Exactly why the Saudis were concerned about Batterjee remains unclear, but Sudan appeared to play a role. The African nation had become a haven for Osama bin Laden, by now one of the biggest critics of the Saudi royal family. And Batterjee had opened an office in Sudan shortly after bin Laden had moved there.

About the same time he was questioned in Saudi Arabia, Batterjee removed his name from the charity’s U.S. paperwork. Arnaout went to the Chicago area to manage the entire charity from there, working out of a rented office in suburban Palos Hills.

With Arnaout now officially in charge, Batterjee was forced to oversee operations from behind the scenes. U.S. government documents and interviews show Arnaout kept him abreast of developments, faxed him important documents and instructed employees not to offer outsiders information about the Saudi financier.

Charity officials also became uneasy about the increasing gap between their stated mission and their actual activities.

While the charity’s public literature implied that it was strictly a relief group, one internal record said that “from its first day, [the charity] aimed to support jihad and mujahedeen.” Another said the mission was “to make Islam supreme on this Earth.”

One top charity official, Suleiman Ahmed, feared that the organization was misleading donors. In a 1999 e-mail message to director Arnaout, he complained that the group was claiming that 100 percent of a special fund was going to orphans when the figure was actually much lower.

The statement was dishonest, he said, and he did not agree with what Batterjee had “taught” Arnaout & I out such

Despite the concerns, Batterjee's charity continued to prosper, collecting $3.3 million in donations in 2000—more than ever before.

Then came 9/11.

Mounting pressure

Patrick Fitzgerald had just arrived on a flight from New York to Chicago when the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were struck. He hurried to his hotel room, turned on the television and watched the second tower fall.

Fitzgerald was only one week into his job as the U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois. He had earned a reputation in New York as an aggressive federal prosecutor with a superb memory and a fierce work ethic. After helping win convictions in the 1993 World Trade Center attack and the 1998 African embassy bombings, he was viewed by many as the nation's top expert on Islamic terrorism.

As much as Sept. 11 horrified him, he said he would not personally try a case in Chicago for a year so he could focus on his administrative duties. But in the ensuing weeks, with the nation's attention increasingly focused on terrorism, he decided to take on Batterjee's organization.

The charity was not unknown to U.S. authorities. The FBI had picked through its garbage as early as 1999, and a 1996 CIA report said Batterjee's group and 14 other Islamic relief organizations "employ members or otherwise facilitate the activities of terrorist groups operating in Bosnia."

U.S. authorities also had been concerned about Saudi charities in general, traveling to the kingdom in 1999 and 2000 to urge the Saudi government to curb the groups. But the Saudis did little, and the United States did not push the matter because of a long political understanding: America would defend the kingdom militarily and not meddle in its internal affairs if the Saudis remained a loyal oil supplier and Middle East ally.

When Fitzgerald began poring over documents in the Batterjee case, he recognized some of the same names from his previous terrorism investigations: Salim Bayazid, Khalifa. "Those names jumped off the page," he recalled.

With the heat on Muslim militants, managers at Batterjee's charity started scrambling.

One e-mailed Arnaout in November 2001 to say that about half of the charity's expenditures in Bosnia were not on the books and that he feared authorities would find out.

Arnaout decided to handle the problem in person, but shortly after he left for Bosnia, federal agents raided his home in suburban Justice and the charity office in Palos Hills. The U.S. also froze the charity's assets.

He flew back to the United States, and soon after, Bosnian agents raided his apartment and several other homes there.

Arnaout phoned his top aide in Bosnia to assess the extent of the latest raids. "Have they come to your house?" Arnaout asked, according to U.S. transcripts of secretly recorded conversations.

"The aide answered yes. "And your father's house?"

"Yes."

"And your mother's house?"

"Yes."

"And your in-laws' house?"

"Everyone."

In a call to his brother, Arnaout said he feared U.S. officials were trying to determine whether the charity was linked to anyone in Saudi Arabia. And much to Arnaout's consternation, Batterjee persisted in wiring money from the kingdom.

"By God, he does not understand me," Arnaout told his brother. "It appears he is becoming senile a little bit sometimes."

Weary and frightened, Arnaout was not sure what to do. In a phone conversation, Batterjee suggested that Arnaout move to Saudi Arabia.

But it was too late. On April 30, 2002, Arnaout was arrested.

Connecting the dots

That fall, U.S. Atty. Gen. John Ashcroft arrived in Chicago to announce terrorism charges against Arnaout—the first time in a decade that an attorney general had come to the city to announce an indictment.

Before a packed news conference at the Dirksen Federal Building, Ashcroft and Fitzgerald said Arnaout had spent at least 10 years funneling charity money to bin Laden's terrorist network, Al Qaeda, and to other armed groups.

Ashcroft pointed to "an archive of incriminating documents," including a purported list of donors and fund raisers
for Afghan fighters. The name appearing most on the list of fundraisers was bin Laden.
Next was Batterjee.
But for the time being, authorities named Batterjee only as an unindicted co-conspirator.

When Fitzgerald began piecing together the evidence, he saw a charity that had many contacts with alleged members of Al Qaeda’s network. One alleged member once headed the charity’s office in Chechnya; another traveled to Bosnia under the guise of being a charity director.

But as the court case progressed, it became increasingly clear that Fitzgerald was having trouble connecting the dots.

One link Fitzgerald cited involved Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, the friend of Batterjee’s who participated in the Afghan-Soviet war. In a news release, Fitzgerald pointed to an FBI affidavit that linked Khalifa to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and other terrorist plots.

The main evidence the prosecutor offered tying Khalifa to Batterjee’s charity was that several years before, someone in the charity’s Palos Hills office called a telephone number that was, according to the affidavit and news release, “associated” with Khalifa.

While Fitzgerald viewed this example and others as solid evidence, the judge handling the case did not. She made several rulings that indicated the case was not going in the prosecutor’s favor.

Fitzgerald decided to cut a deal. Arnaout agreed to plead guilty to racketeering charge, admitting he had defrauded donors by diverting almost $316,000 to fighters in Bosnia and Chechnya. In return, prosecutors dropped the terrorism count—ending the only U.S. terrorism charge brought against a top official of a Saudi charity.

Arnaout was sentenced to 11 years in prison. At a news conference afterward, Fitzgerald did not mention the man who was truly in charge of the charity: Batterjee.

‘A touchy subject’

Forty-five minutes north of Jiddah, just off a long desert highway, is Sultana’s, a large outdoor fish restaurant with neon signs, small fountains and kiddie rides. It is run by Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, whom Fitzgerald characterized as a prominent terrorist operative linked to Batterjee’s charity.

On this night, Khalifa greets diners, monitors the kitchen and sits down to the house specialty: barbecued parrotfish. He mocks U.S. authorities for their unproven accusations against Batterjee and himself.

“They don’t like to admit they are mistaken,” he says. “They don’t like to accept all the evidence in the world.”

Since Sept. 11, the United States has frozen the assets of 20 Islamic charities worldwide, but only one other Saudi charity besides Batterjee’s has been affected: Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation, one of the larger relief organizations in the kingdom. The assets of eight of its offices have been frozen.

The Saudis say they have audited all of their charities, banned them from sending money abroad and closed Al-Haramain offices.

One person who has faced increased scrutiny since Sept. 11 is Batterjee. At the request of the United States, Saudi officials interviewed him several times and checked his bank accounts and wire transfers, according to Adel Al-Jubeir, spokesman for Crown Prince Abdullah, Saudi Arabia’s de facto ruler.

Nothing improper was found, the Saudi spokesman said. “Why do you want us to convict someone who you … don’t have evidence on?”

Today, Batterjee lives in Jiddah in a large white house surrounded by palm trees, flowering bushes and a 6-foot-high wall. A gold plaque next to the iron gates says: “The home of Adel Al-Jalil Batterjee.”

His charity activities have been curtailed, with Arnaout in prison and the U.S. Treasury holding the group’s assets. Batterjee, 58, spoke only briefly to the Tribune, saying, “This is a touchy subject, and there are a lot of things you don’t know about.”

In his 2002 book, Batterjee writes that the West is morally corrupt and that its war on terrorism is just an excuse to try to stop Muslims from spreading Islam. He says Muslims have tried to peacefully expand Islam throughout the world, but those attempts have always met armed opposition. So Muslims have a right to fight back.

More and more clashes with the West are inevitable, he writes, predicting that they will culminate in a final military encounter: “Does any doubt remain that the great confrontation … is certainly coming?”
Egpyt's cultural shift reflects Islam's pull

Masses find solace in conservatism

By Lisa Anderson
 Tribune correspondent

CAIRO—With her long, dark tangle of glossy hair, sensuous lips and provocative stare, Hala Shiha reigns as "the Aphrodite of the Egyptian cinema."

Producers throw starring roles at the 25-year-old actress' feet. Teenage girls decorate their rooms with her posters. Fan magazines scramble to feature her in their pages.

But the cover shot of Shiha on an issue of the popular Egyptian movie magazine Al Kawakab showed a side of the star that few fans ever imagined.

Scarce is a trace of makeup on her ethereally pallid face, Shiha appeared wearing a snowy white hijab, the traditional Muslim head scarf, primly pinned under her chin and modestly draped over her chest.

"This is something I wanted for a long time," she told the magazine, whose name means "the planets."

"Being a star isn't a dream anymore. I'm only busy in my religion now. I know the veil will lessen the roles offered, but maybe this will make me look for another job besides acting."

Shiha's embrace of the veil, a rising phenomenon among Egyptian women, is the most visible symbol of a conservative Islamic resurgence that is sweeping across Egypt. But it is not the only one.

During the past 30 years, a conservative Islamic revival has been quietly transforming the nation's culture and society, forcing Egyptians and their political leaders to engage in an increasingly difficult balancing act between mosque and state.

The result is a nation that daily is becoming less secular: That such a thing could happen in sophisticated Cairo, once the Middle East's cosmopolitan Hollywood on the Nile and heart of Arab publishing, portends a cultural trend that could sweep through moderate Arab nations and set them on an even more anti-Western tilt.

The shift away from the moderate style of Islam long practiced in Egypt is pronounced, according to Nagwa Shoeb, director of public relations at the liberal American University in Cairo.

"What you're seeing is an overt sign of your faith. We never did it before. It used to be a private affair."

PLEASE SEE EGYPT, PAGE 20
As more Egyptian women wear the veil, Cairo shops reflect the trend, dressing some mannequins in hijab and others in Western attire. The veil has perhaps become the most visible symbol of the conservative Islamic surge sweeping the nation.
1990s crackdown scatters militants

EGYPT
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

said Shoeb.
Public displays of piety are everywhere.
Egyptian men point with pride to the zabibas on their foreheads—large, bruise-colored calluses raised by the constant thumping of the forehead to the floor in prayer.

Audiences at movie theaters rise in protest against films that offend increasingly conservative Islamic sensibilities.

On the airwaves, a new, flashier brand of media-savvy preacher woos young Muslims away from decadent Western ways, emphasizing praying over partying.

Government censors, at times at the behest of students, yank books from college curricula for containing what they consider offensive depictions of sex, religion or the Egyptian state.

In some countries, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, the practice of Islam is imposed from above.

But in Egypt, the move toward a more conservative Islam is bubbling up from a population frustrated by decades of ineffective leadership, recurring humiliation of Arabs at the hands of Israel and the West, rampant corruption and heavy-handed suppression of dissent.

Having tried everything from Pan-Arabism to socialism, many Egyptians, rich and poor, see a return to Islam as a way to restore hope, peace and dignity to their lives. Threatened by a changing world, rife with Western influences, they perceive Islam as a comforting source of strong family values, an unyielding moral code and a clear guide to life.

Not every Egyptian is happy or willing to ride this wave of stricter Islamic observance. Indeed, barely two months after announcing in early 2003, the noble starlet Shiba shed her veil and resumed her career: “The real hijab,” she told an Egyptian magazine, “is that of the heart and soul… and not just the covering of the head.”

But Egypt, the Arab world’s largest nation and long its political and cultural capital, cannot reverse course so easily. And that poses a big problem for the country’s political leaders.

Even though the state controls Egypt’s major newspapers, censors all media and appoints and pays the sheik of Cairo’s Al-Azhar University, the Muslim world’s highest authority on Sunni scholarship, small but powerful groups of Islamic activists can undermine the political establishment.

Aware of the threat to its authority but anxious not to appear un-Islamic, the government of President Hosni Mubarak veers between throwing Islamists into prison and tossing them political sops, such as its release last fall of the ailing Karam Zohdy, a leader of the radical Islamic Group, who was convicted of plotting the 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.

“There is kind of a divorce between the government and the people. People trust more in what is organized by the people, especially Islamic groups,” said Montasser Al Zayat, a lawyer in his late 40s who represents dissidents from the Muslim Brotherhood and its radical offshoots, the Islamic Group and Islamic Jihad, all groups in the crosshairs of America’s war on terrorism.

“Maybe the United States has succeeded in accomplishing what the groups themselves could not do. It has re-established again the link between the groups and the people,” he said, with a faint smile.

Public pressure

Nowhere is the impact of Egypt’s Islamization more evident than in its arts community, particularly the once-booming movie industry.

“The pressures used to be from censorship. Today, the pressures are coming from the public,” said Inas El Degheidy, 45, one of Egypt’s leading female film directors.

“And this,” she said, “is much more dangerous than censorship.”

El Degheidy drew public criticism over her 2001 film, “Memoirs of a Teenager,” which explored black market surgeries to restore girls’ virginity.

“When it was released to the public, fanatics took it to court. They considered the girls in the film were doing things that Egyptian girls wouldn’t do,” said El Degheidy, herself the
mother of a teenage girl.

"Mothers help daughters do that because in Egypt men aren't used to marrying girls who are not virgins," she said. The lawsuit against her has come to naught.

Sitting in her office in the trendy Mohandiseen quarter of Cairo, El Deheidy is tall and slim with a high, blond ponytail. She is fashionably dressed in a low V-neck cashmere sweater and wears skin tight leopard-print capri pants by Christian Dior and tan suede boots with stiletto heels; a Louis Vuitton satchel is at her feet.

"When I used to go to secondary school, I used to wear a miniskirt. I cannot even go on the street the way I am dressed now," she said, unless she stays in upscale precincts where there are more foreign residents.

If she ventures elsewhere, she said, men will ask her: "Where are you going to hide from God?"

The concerns of artists such as El Deheidy are reflected every day in the rustling darkness of Cairo theaters. Moviegoers get the same thing—popcorn, Coke and previews—that mark the movie-house experience from Feoria to Paris. The difference is in what comes first.

The image of an officially stamped Ministry of Culture form, often crudely filled out by hand, precedes every trailer and every film, certifying that it was reviewed for objectionable religious, sexual and political content and approved by state censors.

Religious themes, particularly any depiction of Allah or the Prophet Muhammad, are especially delicate. For example, Egyptian censors recently banned the Jim Carrey movie "Bruce Almighty" because it features an actor, Morgan Freeman, "playing the role of God." When Western films are shown, they are stripped of "objectionable scenes."

But directors say state censors pale in comparison with Egyptian audiences, whose Islamic tastes are reflected in the content of most current local films.

What most Egyptians see—and demand to see—these days is far different from what entertained their parents and grandparents.

For most of its history, which began in 1923, the Egyptian mo-

vie industry provided a variety of films, including many with an unvarnished view of Egyptian social problems. One example is a 1960s-era film whose title translates roughly as "A Woman With a Bad Reputation."

In the movie, a husband encourages his demure, young wife to dance with his boss at a party to promote the husband's career. Many trousers wear miniskirts and hot pants; they drink, smoke and dance. There isn't a veil in sight. The wife becomes the boss' mistress. We see them in bed together. We see her life become corrupt, her husband fired and her marriage in tatters. Finally, she accepts gifts from the boss in a desperate bid to raise money to treat her sick son.

The star of that film, one of the most beautiful and glamorous of Egypt's actresses, was Shams al-Baroudi. But, in the early 1980s, she was one of the first Egyptian actresses to renounce acting as sinful and take the veil. These days, she wears niqab—the total shrouding of the body in black fabric with only the eyes showing. And the only appearances she makes are on religious satellite television.

"I am working on a new book called 'Cinema As a Sin,'" said Samir Farid, dean of Egyptian film critics, dryly. It will chronicle actresses, such as al-Baroudi, who took the veil and "repented" their acting as sinful, he said.

A tall, courtly man with thick salt-and-pepper hair and nattily dressed in a navy-blue suit, Farid, 60, has been reviewing movies for the daily newspaper Al-Gomhuria, or The Republic, since 1965 and has written a number of books on cinema.

"The question of the veil and the question of sin is only in Egypt," he said, noting that such issues have not come up among Syrian, Lebanese, Moroccan or Tunisian actresses. Consequently, many of them are now sought after for roles Egyptian actresses refuse, such as those involving a kiss, a skimpy swimsuit or sexual content.

And, only in Egypt have movie audiences booed and hissed films they find offensive, Farid said. One such case was 2001's "Secrets of the Girls," starring Hala Shihab's sister, Maya. The film is critical of society's harsh treatment of unwed mothers, a
Shaaban El Sayed, sales manager for a carpet and gift shop in Cairo's Khan el-Khalili bazaar, closes up shop so he can go pray.
Egypt

Population: 74.7 million (2003 est.)
Percent Muslim: 94 (mostly Sunni)
Government type: Republic
Literacy rate: 57.7 percent
Legal system: Based on English common law, Islamic law and Napoleonic codes
Industries: Textiles, food processing, tourism, chemicals
Agriculture: Cotton, rice, corn, wheat, beans, fruit, cattle

Per capita GDP: $1,470 (2001-02);
(U.S.: $37,600)

Sources: CIA World Factbook,
U.S. State Department
Chicago Tribune

subject some audiences find indecent.
"If you read any of the criticism magazines, they have a new expression called 'clean cinema,'" added Dawood Abdel Sayed, 57, one of Egypt's leading writer-directors, while sipping coffee on the terrace of the Cairo Opera.

"They mean by this cinema that is clean of sex, even kisses," said Sayed, fashionably dressed in black and sporting thin, tortoiseshell glasses. "The purpose of this is to allow the whole family—husband, wife, children—to go to the cinema and see things which won't offend their sensibilities." According to Farid, "This is cinema with a veil—not on the head, but on the mind.

An example is the recent hit movie "Thieves in Thailand." A mindless romp spiced with lush Thai landscapes, the film revolves around a romance—but not a single kiss sullies the screen.

Farouk Sabry, vice chairman of the quasi-governmental Egyptian Chamber of Cinema Industry, is not surprised by the trend.

Owner of 26 movie theaters and producer of more than 80 films, Sabry has the look and gruff delivery of an old-style Hollywood mogul.

A middle-age, heavyset man sporting a pencil mustache, gold-tinted aviator glasses and shiny black patent-leather shoes, he fingered rosewood worry beads with his right hand as he talked and brandished a thick cigar with his left.

"Why happy, stupid films? Because of the international troubles affecting everybody. Everybody is sad. They want to pay money not to cry again. They can cry on the bus in the morning," he said, noting that of the average 20 Egyptian films produced annually, nearly all are comedies or action pictures.

"Cinema in Egypt is finished," said Farid, the critic, referring to the dwindling number of films made in Egypt and what he considers the decline in quality.

His eyes welling with tears, Farid said he retreats to his personal archives to see Egyptian films that present an uncensored world. Some 400 are even banned from television, he said. "The word 'backward' really exists. You can touch it. You can feel it. You can smell it."

A call to prayers

Around midday on Friday, the Muslim holy day, the relentless cacophony that is Cairo drops an octave. Suddenly, loudspeakers from mosques blare so many sermons into the dusty streets that the city seems to become one vast, unavoidable, open-air service.

Never, Cairenes say, have Friday prayers been so well attended, affirmed by the weekly scene at Al-Hussein Mosque in the heart of what is called Islamic Cairo.

Worshippers cram into the huge sand-colored mosque, routinely overflowing the spacious interior, spilling out onto its broad marble terrace. So nervous is the government that fiery and provocative sermons will ignite riots, it routinely stations vans full of police in riot gear near Al-Hussein and other major Cairo mosques.

As Friday prayers end, the clatter of rising security gates echoes through the labyrinthine passageways of the adjacent Khan el-Khalili bazaar. A winding warren of stalls, the sprawling 700-year-old market brims with goods of every description from 22-karat gold sold by the ounce to spices sold by the kilo to belly-dancing outfits for tourists sold in toddler sizes.

Merchants said an increasing number of their neighbors shut down during Friday prayers and even for daily prayers, hanging up "Gone to 10 minutes to pray" signs in Arabic and English.

Many Egyptians trace the Islamic revival to Israel's stunning defeat of the Arabs in 1967's Six-Day War—a debacle many blamed on Egyptians' getting too close to the West and too far away from traditional Islam.

The movement also draws heavily from the purist tenets of Wahhabism. This most austere and puritanical version of the faith, which rejects Western influence and demands a way of life and government based on Shariah, or Islamic law, emanates from Saudi Arabia. Hundreds of thousands of Egyptians worked in the kingdom during the oil boom years and returned home as a conservative middle class with rigid Wahhabi beliefs, a new taste for clean cinema and enough money to buy a $5 movie ticket to see it.

Although those returning from Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, and other Persian Gulf states use religious symbols to express this new Islamic fervor, the movement has flowered as a social and political ideology in a society bereft of alternatives. Nationalism, Pan-Arabism, socialism or capitalism—none of these movements, so far, have brought modern Egyptians the pride, political participation and prosperity
As police stand by, men put on their shoes after leaving Al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo following Friday prayers. The government's fear that provocative sermons will ignite riots has led it to routinely station police in riot gear near Cairo's mosques, some of which are filled to overflowing.

The ultimate goal of the Brotherhood is to restore an Islamic caliphate, or empire, in the world. Short term, the dream is to transform Egypt into a true Islamic state, replacing secular government with Shariah, which includes stringent rules on alcohol, the role of women and dress codes.

Although long officially banned, the Brotherhood has been one of the most effective engines driving the Islamization of Egypt. And Egyptians, devout or not, agree their country is in the throes of a deep cultural change that has profound ramifications.

"For the past 100 years, people have drifted away from traditional values, and now they're coming back," said Gen. Fouad Allam, retired deputy chief of Egypt's counterterrorism unit, fingering a set of malachite worry beads.

The silver-haired Allam interviewed every major Islamic militant in Egypt from 1967 until his retirement in 1988. "The Islam on the increase is the right kind of Islam," he said, referring to the peaceful nature of this revival compared with the years of bloodshed that preceded it.

The non-violent approach came at least partially in response to a government crackdown. Egypt has been ruled under an emergency law since the Oct. 6, 1981, assassination of Sadat by radical Islamists. Human-rights groups say the law, which suspends some civil liberties and permits indefinite detention without charges, has been abused to imprison and sometimes torture thousands of political prisoners, homosexuals and others who run afoul of the state.

No question, Egypt suffered wrenching bouts of violence from radical Islamists; in the 1990s more than 1,000 people were killed by the kind of terrorism now wreaking havoc in countries such as Spain, Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia.

Egyptians and most of the world were horrified in 1997...
Velled women and girls are an increasingly common sight in Cairo. Here, three backpack-toting schoolgirls walk through a neighborhood in Old Cairo.
when Islamic militants shot and hacked to death 58 foreign tourists at the temple of Queen Hatshepsut in Luxor’s fabled Valley of the Kings.

It was one of the worst acts of Islamic terrorism to bloody Egyptian soil and, to date, it also was the last. The government came down hard, banning radical Islamic groups, jailing thousands of their members and suppressing any kind of dissent.

After the Luxor massacre, faced with the pressure from the government and repudiation by a citizenry shocked by the carnage and the resulting devastation of a tourism-dependent economy, the nation’s most violent militant organizations, Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Group, effectively left Egypt.

But, they only switched their focus from what they view as the near enemy, the secular Egyptian government, to the distant enemy, the West. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Islamic Jihad’s Egyptian-born leader, joined forces with Saudi terrorist leader Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda organization in Afghanistan.

For its part, the Muslim Brotherhood forswore violence and tempered its militancy to a form that may turn out to be far more persuasive.

Currently composed primarily of doctors, lawyers, engineers and other professionals, the Brotherhood and its rallying cry—“Islam is the solution”—offer a sense of identity, political participation, personal empowerment and hope that an autocratic government does not.

The movement in Egypt feeds on the widespread belief that the U.S. unconditionally favors Israel and that the war on terrorism truly is a war against Islam.

In a rare survey of Egyptian public opinion, a 2002 study by the Pew Global Attitudes Project found that only 6 percent of Egyptians held a favorable view of America.

The increasingly popular idea that Islam is under attack by the West—amplified by near-daily satellite television coverage throughout the Arab world of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—gained further currency after the U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In Egypt, a country of 74 million with nearly half the adults illiterate, television images, often far more graphic than those seen in the U.S., carry a particular power to persuade.

There is also discontent with a government many perceive as corrupt, autocratic and a puppet of the U.S., which sends $2 billion in annual aid. With Islamic activists, like the well-heeled Brotherhood, often supplying clinics, schools and other social services that the government fails to adequately provide, the attraction of this conservative ideology deepens.

“They [the Brotherhood] have teachers willing to teach. Doctors willing to treat people. They convince the people of their power,” said Mohamed Abdel Monem, editor of the pro-government weekly political magazine Rose El-Youssef.

“If you are cornered, then the only way out is religion,” he said, shaking his head.

Society’s move toward Islamization is reflected in the many religious channels on satellite television, such as the Saudi-owned Iqraa, which means “read” or “recite”—the first order given to the Prophet Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel.
Last August, Cairo’s Al-Azhar University, the oldest university in the world, announced plans to launch its own satellite channel to propagate Islamic teaching.

Indeed, among the latest groups to express an interest in setting up a satellite channel is the Muslim Brotherhood.

Arab images

Much of Egyptian television these days emanates from the stark, antenna- and dish-studded headquarters of NileSat, the 7-year-old Egyptian satellite company, which sits in the desert just outside Cairo, among the newly planted palms, freshly paved roadways and recently built suburban developments of 8th of October City.

Inside the gleaming, futuristic control room, a bank of 150 monitors constantly displays what many in the Arab world—including 15 million Californians—are watching.

The choices are as dizzying as the vividly colored images flickering from a wall covered in a crazy quilt of television screens. Here is Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat in his Ramallah headquarters. There is a sheik earnestly preaching. Here, a soccer game or soap opera. There, a woman getting a facial or a surfer catching a wave. Satellite television channel providers, except pay-per-view programmers, sign a contract with NileSat agreeing not to broadcast material that is overly sexual or critical of religion or the Egyptian government.

Some of the programs originate just down the road in Egyptian Medien Production City, a sprawling 7-year-old complex of glass and coral-colored stone office buildings, indoor and outdoor movie sets, a theme park, convention center and hotel. Some 25 television programs ranging from Middle East Broadcasting’s megahit “Who Wants To Be a Millionaire” to Arab Radio and Television Network’s popular religious shows on the 24-hour channel Iqraa, originate at the facility.

The ever-expanding reach of satellite television provides a key to another Egyptian phenomenon: the pop-culture-conscious preacher.

One of the most popular of this new, younger, hipper breed of imams who preach on television and CD and through MP3 players is Amr Khaled. Dubbed the “sheik to the chic,” Khaled, a thirtysomething Egyptian accountant by profession, has become a sort of religious rock star to the trendsetting young rich and their parents since the late 1990s.

Young people identify with his close-cropped hair, his designer suits and his low-key approach in which he urges women to wear the veil. And they respond to his message that religion and fun are not mutually exclusive, there is no shame in wealth and there is salvation in Islam.

Khaled is popular, so much so that his followers attribute his departure to Britain in late 2002 to pressure from a government that views him as a threat. The government denies such charges. Khaled may be gone, but his video and audiotapes still circulate widely.

“He’s very convincing,” said Mohammed Saled, 18, an English major at American University in Cairo.

“Amr Khaled explains why it’s essential to wear the veil,” he said, noting his mother and sister are Khaled fans.

While aware of Khaled, Reem Shehata, 19, a computer-science major at AUC, said her decision to take the veil two years ago came “from the inside.”

“If we don’t veil,” she said, “we commit a sin.”

A glance at the courtyards and classrooms at the university suggests that Shehata is hardly alone.

Western enclave

A Lawrence Durrellian collection of cream-colored neo-Islamic buildings with arched galleries and tall windows encaised in lacy, dark wooden screens, the American University in Cairo has been an enclave of green lawns, palm trees and Western ideas abutting the noise and dust of central Tahrir Square since 1919.

The university, which has about 5,000 students, has educated some of the most influential people in the Middle East, including Queen Rania of Jordan and Egypt’s first lady Suzanne Mubarak.

In its palm-shaded courtyards, where well-to-do coeds blithely wore miniskirts a generation ago, veils predominate. In fact, the school recently grappled with whether students have the right to envelop themselves in niqab.

Students admitted in the 2003-2004 academic year were the first to have rules on such matters laid down in the application materials: For reasons of security and of identification, niqab is not allowed on campus.

“Tink it would be a very simplistic approach to say that if a woman puts a scarf on her head she is backward,” said Nagwa Shoeb of the university’s public-relations department. “There are women who are very liberal, very high class and very educated who are veiled.”

However, she said, “Among my friends, when someone veils, we are stunned.”

Many young women said that the scarf, which has come to connote virtue, is empowering. Not only does it ward off unwanted male attention but it often leads parents to grant more independence.

Said Shoeb, “I always say if they’re covering their hair, it’s OK as long as they are not covering their minds.”

In recent years, however, the upsurge in conservatism among the primarily affluent AUC student body has prompted government officials to yank books from the curricula and shelves of the campus library for being offensive to Islam, even though they were cleared by the state censors, who review all imported and domestic publications.

In 1999, “For Bread Alone,” by Moroccan novelist Mohamed Choukri, and four political-science textbooks, including “Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and the Pharaoh” by Gilles Kepel, a leading expert on political Islam, were banned for indecency and slandering Islam.

Many AUC students likely will enter the ranks of the lawyers, doctors, engineers and other professionals who are the intellectual and financial backbone of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

Why the movement holds such an attraction for the well
educated and well to do is no mystery to Saad Eddin Ibrahim, an American-Egyptian sociologist at the university and a human-rights and democracy advocate, he has been jailed four times by the Mubarak regime, most recently for tarnishing the image of Egypt.

"With a high education, good occupation, you expect a good income and, if you have all three, you expect a share in power," said Ibrahim, 65, sitting on the terrace of his home in suburban Maadi.

"They're educated, they're intelligent—but they don't have a share in politics," said Ibrahim, describing the frustration rampant among the ranks of upscale Egyptians as "status inconsistency."

The Muslim Brotherhood tells them it's because everything is corrupt and the government is an agent of the West. This is soothing to their self-respect," he said.

Slowly, the trend toward Islamization in Egypt is becoming the norm. But, for many Egyptians, it remains problematic.
“People are no longer sure of their life. They’re not sure if this is the right thing. Now, they are mostly convinced that their modern look is wrong and, one day when they get older, they have to be ‘good’ and wear the veil,” said Hala Mustafa, head of the political department at the quasi-governmental Center for Political and Strategic Studies at Cairo’s Al-Ahram Institute.

“The frustration. The lack of enjoyment,” she said, sighing. “This is something you can see, how it can affect your life if you live in the Middle East or Arab countries. There is no place here to go out with friends, go for a drink, see good cinema.”

Nothing symbolizes this change in Egyptian culture as eloquently as the veil and the growing number of women, rich and poor, who are adopting it.

Recently, the Egyptian media reported that Hala Shiba suddenly pulled out of a starring role in a movie with comic actor Adel Imam. It has been about a year since Shiba donned the veil only to reverse course some two months later.

According to the reports, her father, artist Ahmad Shiba, fears that the starlet is being pressured to resume veiling from former actresses who quit the stage and took the veil—fears that his daughter reportedly denied.

There is no question, however, that the social pressure to take the veil is significant, for movie stars and society matrons alike. According to Iqbal Baraka, editor of the popular women’s magazine Hawa and author of the recent book “Al Hijab: A New Vision,” the twist is that they are putting on very the thing that an earlier generation fought to take off, considering it a symbol of women’s exclusion from public life.

Many educated Egyptian women readily battle off the famous story of Huda Shaarawi. A wealthy feminist and women’s rights activist, she defiantly ripped off her veil in the Cairo train station in 1923.

But these days, Agence France-Presse in Cairo reports, a Shaarawi granddaughter wears the veil.

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**Egypt since Colonialism**

1922 Britain ends 40 years of control over Egypt, granting it independence. The following year, Egypt becomes a constitutional monarchy.

1928 The Muslim Brotherhood forms in Egypt. The group later becomes a powerful advocate of Islamic-style political and social reform in the Middle East.

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**A Time of War**

1939-45 During World War II, Egypt serves as a base for British operations in the region.

1945 Egypt is a founding member of the United Nations and helps establish the Arab League.

1948 Egypt and other Arab nations suffer a humiliating defeat in a war against the newly created Jewish state of Israel.

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**The Nationalist**

1952 The Free Officers, military officials who are critical of Egypt’s defeat in the 1948 war, overthrow King Farouk. The group is led by Lt. Col. Gamal Abdel Nasser.

1953 Egypt becomes a republic, with a president and prime minister.

1954 Nasser becomes prime minister in April. Six months later, the Muslim Brotherhood is implicated in an attempt on Nasser’s life and is banned.

1956 In July, one month after Nasser is elected president, Egypt seizes control of the Suez Canal, prompting an invasion by Britain, France and Israel. The foreign powers eventually withdraw, and Egypt retains control of the canal.

1967 Egypt’s air force is largely destroyed in June in the Six-Day War. Egypt also loses the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula.

1970 Nasser dies. Vice President Anwar Sadat is elected president.

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**The Peacemaker**

1973 Egypt and Syria attack Israel in October. After early gains, the Egyptians are driven back and a cease-fire is declared.

1979 In March, Egypt and Israel sign a peace treaty brokered by U.S. President Jimmy Carter that lays the groundwork for the return of the Sina Peninsula to Egypt in 1982. The agreement leads to expanded U.S. aid to Egypt.

1981 Sadat is assassinated by Islamic extremists in October. Vice President Hosni Mubarak is elected president.

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**The Autocrat**

Early 1990s The Egyptian government begins a crackdown on radical Islamic groups responsible for violence against Christians and foreigners.

1991 Egyptian troops join the U.S.-led coalition opposed to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.

1995 Mubarak introduces a law allowing for prison time for journalists who publish material harmful to public officials. The law is voided by Egypt’s Constitutional Court, but censorship continues.

2003 Egypt opposes the U.S.-led war in Iraq.


Chicago Tribune
Iran loses faith in clerics
A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Twenty-five years ago, the Iranian people toppled the Shah of Iran, seized the American Embassy in Tehran and established an Islamic republic, a unique form of government that they thought would fix their country's problems. The fourth part of this Tribune series on Islam looks at how even some esteemed ayatollahs are having second thoughts about the wisdom of a government controlled by clerics — something sought by many factions in the struggle for the soul of Islam.

On the walls of the former U.S. Embassy in Tehran, a mural depicts the Statue of Liberty with a skull instead of the face of a woman.

Change elusive in rigid society

By Kim Barker

Tribune correspondent

QOM, Iran — The mobs shouted for his blood. They called him a traitor; they yelled, “Death to Montazeri.”

The target of their wrath? The Grand Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri.

Once, he was hardly apparent to the ruling party of the country, an Iranian equivalent to Thomas Jefferson, an Islamic revolutionary who helped topple the dreaded Shah of Iran. Now, though, his fall from grace seemed certain. Outside his home, an unruly crowd of hundreds had branded him a heretic.

As Montazeri, partially deaf, prayed in a room behind his office, he barely heard bricks shattering the windows. But his family members were scared. They ran from the cleric to the chaos outside and back, trying to shield Montazeri from harm.

Eventually the police took action on that day in 1997, spraying the mob with tear gas. The aging cleric and his family escaped harm. But they would endure years of punishment, house arrest, prison and harassment.

Montazeri's crime was simple: He had publicly criticized his one-time allies, the clerics who run the country, for abandoning human rights and freedom as the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

"The shah is gone," Montazeri said in a recent interview. "But a heretic has replaced him."

On one level, the story of Hussein Ali Montazeri is a powerful drama of life, death and resurrection in one of the world's most rigid societies. Critics say he is naive, manipulated by the people around him and bitter after falling out of favor with the government. But at 82, Montazeri has survived years of intellectual apartheid to rise again in the eyes of the Islamic world. Today he is considered one of the top two Shi'ite clerics worldwide and is a powerful voice for moderation in Iran.

His story also shows the ups and downs of the struggle over Islam in a nation where large numbers of people yearn for the economic and political ease promised by theocracy but long for freedom.

Grand Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri.

PLEASE SEE IRAN, PAGE 18
Young people gather in a popular teahouse in the village of Darband outside Tehran. About 70 percent of Iranians are now younger than 30. Although the Islamic Revolution isolated Iran, the internet has helped introduce youths to the West, allowing them to download music and meet in chat rooms.
freedoms practiced in the secular West, often viewed as an icon of immorality by the conservative clerics of Iran.

In thick, black-rimmed glasses, a white skullcap, cardigan sweater and long robe, Montazeri hardly fits the image of a rebel. His hands shake. He often sits on a heating pad. He suffers from diabetes, but he hides chocolates in a desk drawer. He speaks in sing-song sentences that trail off in a wheeze.

But Montazeri is at the heart of the battle over Iran's fate—one that could hint at the future in the Middle East, where radicals from Iraq to the Gaza Strip want an Islamic revolution like the one that happened in Iran 25 years ago.

On one side are the powerful clerics who rule Iran and thwart the most modest reforms.

On the other side, grass-roots reformers, complain that the fight for an Islamic democracy actually led to an Islamic dictatorship, one that fails or even kills its critics, violates basic rights and distorts the tenets of Islam.

Led by senior clerics such as Montazeri and one-time foot soldiers of the revolution, they seek democratic reforms that would restore a respect for human rights and freedom. Some, such as Montazeri, believe that the country can be run through an Islamic system. But others believe that religion has no place in government.

They want the clergy to return to the mosques. They want a true democracy.

"I don't have any doubt it will come," said Ibrahim Yazdi, the Islamic Republic's first foreign minister, who now leads the country's only secular-leaning political party.

The people of Iran are caught in the middle, chanting "Death to America" at Friday prayers then welcoming American visitors with fresh fruit. They adhere to strict Islamic codes in public but disappear behind closed doors to drink homemade vodka and watch MTV.

They live in a nation that is rich in oil but has a stagnant economy. Jobs are scarce, the air polluted, the press controlled and the politics repressive.

And in the ultimate irony of the Islamic Republic, the country is becoming less religious, not more.

Friday prayers

On a Friday in January, one of Iran's top politicians stood on an outdoor stage at the University of Tehran, praising the Islamic Revolution to a crowd of thousands.

"This is a big achievement," said Hashemi Rafsanjani, Iran's president from 1989 to 1997. "In today's world, when many countries and people are against religion, we see a religion emerging capable of making a country run."

This was no ordinary political stump speech. Rafsanjani was leading weekly Friday prayers, a blend of politics and religion, of pep rally and prayer, of love for Iran's government and hate for the U.S. and Israel.

On one side of the audience, about 5,000 women sat on Persian carpets. Most wore chadors, sometimes using their teeth to hold the sheet-like coverings over their hair and bodies. They could not see Rafsanjani over the tall dividers separating them from about 15,000 men.

During Rafsanjani's speech, the crowd responded with the same cheers of praise shouted since the revolution. "God is great," they yelled. "Death to the United States."

Iran is still a religious country despite pushes for political reform. People in the crowd on Fridays embrace the revolution and all that has followed.

"Until the day we no longer have blood in our veins, we will say 'Death to America,'" said Soraya Ghoyoomi, before cheerfully handing an apple to an American.

But the appeal of such services has slipped. In the early years of the Islamic Republic, hundreds of thousands of people showed up for Friday prayers in Tehran, according to press reports. Now, in a city of about 7 million, it's difficult to attract 20,000 worshipers.

Mosques were often filled before the revolution. But those who still attend say mosques are now often empty.

Frustrated with their government, some people have turned away from religion. They treat their leaders like intellectual politicians anywhere.
In Tehran, Hamid Khazaee, 23, sells jewelry from his booth at an art bazaar. Many in Iran yearn for the economic and political freedoms practiced in the West.
"I believe in God, but I don't believe in the prophet or the imams or anything else," a 17-year-old girl in pointy high heels said as she put on makeup in the bathroom of the only mall food court in Tehran. "The things we read in the Koran, it's not like the country is right now. That makes us hate them more."

Across Iran, clerics no longer command the respect they once inspired. Taxi drivers refuse to pick them up. More and more jokes are told about the clergy. One cartoon, forwarded by e-mail, depicts clerics' brains being removed before they get turbans. Some people laugh when asked whether they go to Friday prayers.

"This is my Friday prayers," said Vida Farahmand, 40, just after she finished racing laps at a go-kart track outside Tehran.

For years, a quiet rebellion has been brewing in Iran. Many people create two lives. Publicly, they obey the strict rules. Privately, they live as they want. They drink illegal alcohol and watch illegal satellite TV. They use black-market entrepreneurs who promise to deliver whatever, whenever, from whiskey to Western movies.

The government continues to rail against the West—but the West continues to seep into Iran. Instead of McDonald's, there's Mc All's, which sells hamburgers and pizza. Even the shrine to the country's founder has a gift shop selling Sylvester Stallone movies.

In a Tehran hotel in February, a hotel worker intently watched a DVD of "Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle" on a computer. Several days later, other hotel workers crowded around a TV to watch a videotape of one of the many popular Iranian talk shows from Los Angeles, home to so many Iranians that people call it Tehran-geles.

The biggest pop star in Iran now sings a love song to the tune of "Billie Jean" by Michael Jackson. Ask young people about their favorite music, and hear familiar answers: R. Kelly, Metallica, Korn, Madonna. "It's like an epidemic," said Adel Amirli, 16. "Everyone just likes to listen to foreign music."

The Internet has helped introduce the world to Iran. Young people download hip-hop and heavy metal music. In chat rooms, Iranians flirt and vent frustrations with the country. When the government banned part of a book by Czech writer Milan Kundera, the objectionable material soon showed up on the Internet—in Iran's language of Farsi.

"The problem with our young people is their feet are on Iran's ground, but their eyes are on the Internet," said Hamid Ghassemi, who sells fabrics in Tehran's
A stall in Tehran sells Hillary Clinton's book alongside one with ex-Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's face crossed out on the cover.
crowded bazaar. "The things they want and the things they have are very different."

But the young will eventually determine the future of the country. They are already a majority thanks to a push for more Muslim children in the early years of the Islamic Republic. About 70 percent of Iranians are now younger than 30. They do not remember the shah and his secret police. They do not remember the revolution.

The revolution

The story of the Islamic Revolution is written throughout Tehran, a city of smog, traffic snarls and boxy beige buildings nestled beneath a mountain range.

Palace Street is now Palestine Street. The square once named for a monarch's birthday is Revolution Square.

Throughout the city, giant murals feature battlefield scenes of martyrs, men killed fighting for the new country or in the war against Iraq. Pictures of Iran's first two supreme spiritual leaders loom everywhere, on buildings and inside pizza shops.

The former U.S. Embassy, where Iranians seized American hostages in late 1979 and held 52 of them for more than a year, is now a shrine to the hatred for America. Graffiti such as "Death to America" covers the outside walls. A mural of the Statue of Liberty features a skull instead of a woman's face.

The Islamic Revolution had almost as much to do with America as it did with Iran's repressive ruler, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, seen as a pawn of the U.S. in its war against communism.

After Pahlavi fled Iran in 1953, a U.S.-backed coup restored him to power. He turned into a ruthless leader, paranoid and determined not to lose his throne again. The shah created a brutal secret police force and cracked down on Islam. He tried to make Iran a Western oasis in the Middle East.

When faced with dictator-like leaders who embrace the West, people in Islamic countries have often used religion as a political tool.

The cleric Hussein Ali Montazeri became a leader in the underground Islamic movement. He was a close friend of the popular Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, exiled to Iraq and later France for speaking against the shah. Khomeini called his former student "the fruit of my life."

Throughout Iran, rebels handed out smuggled tapes and leaflets of Khomeini's preachings, from mosque to mosque, living room to living room, rallying people against Pahlavi and the influence of America.

Young men left home to join the movement. Women abandoned jeans for the tent-like black chador, a statement of Islamic and Iranian pride.

In Iran, the secular leadership at first refused to bend, responding with brute force. Police shot unarmed religious students in Qom, home to major seminaries and clerics such as Montazeri. Rebels were jailed and tortured.

"They broke all my teeth," recalled Hussein Shariatmadari, now a representative of Iran's supreme leader and editor of the conservative Kayhan newspaper. "Two of my toenails, they ripped them off. They gave me electrical shocks. I lost my kidney."

By 1978, Iran was boiling. Protests and riots rolled through the country for the entire year. People hurled rocks at soldiers, Molotov cocktails at tanks. The rebellion spread like a fever.

In a last-ditch attempt to pacify the country, the government in the fall of 1978 released many political prisoners, including Montazeri, who flew to Paris to meet with Khomeini.

When a new grandson was born, Montazeri's family named him "Down with the shah."

Within months, the shah fled. Khomeini flew home, and Montazeri became his right-hand man, helping run the new country's affairs. He leaned on an automatic rifle while leading Friday prayers at Tehran University. He supervised the writing of a new constitution.

Montazeri favored a government that would, theoretically prevent any one person from grabbing too much power. Iran would be an Islamic democracy, with an elected parliament and an elected president, watched over by the Council of Guardians and the supreme spiritual leader. But the clerics were on uncharted ground.

"We were not familiar with the issue of lawmaking," Montazeri recalled. "We were just some clerics in Qom."

The more-secular nationalists worried that this system created the potential for an Islamic dictator. But Iranians overwhelmingly voted for an Islamic republic and Montazeri's constitution.

The new leaders promised to respect other faiths and set aside five parliament seats for minorities. Armenian Christians were even allowed to legally make their own wine for religious services. But over the years, many of different faiths, whether Jewish or Zoroastrian, would leave Iran, complaining of repression and persecution.

As expected, Khomeini was named Iran's first supreme leader. And eventually, Montazeri was designated his successor. He never commanded the same respect as Khomeini, a larger-than-life, god-like figure. Critics joked that he looked like the cat from a popular cartoon.

Doubts emerge

But Montazeri surprised people.

Emadeddin Baghi was one of many who moved to Qom in the early years of the Islamic Republic, when seminaries overflowed and people packed into Montazeri's office. Baghi, a
Meisam Hashemi, a grandson of Hussein Ali Montazeri, kneels by a plaque honoring an uncle killed in a bombing in 1981.
The world's largest Shiite population

Iran is predominantly Shiite Muslim, a form of Islam that differs slightly from the more prevalent Sunni Islam. About 10 to 20 percent of Muslims worldwide are Shiite.

**SUNNI-SHIITE SCHISM**

**Origin of the split:** After Prophet Muhammad's death in 632, a disagreement arose over who should succeed him as leader of Islam. Two main factions emerged, creating a rift that remains almost 14 centuries later.

- **Shiites** believe that Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, Ali, was his rightful successor, and that Ali's descendants are the true leaders of Islam.
- **Sunnis** believe that Muhammad's most pious companions were his rightful successors, and that the leaders of Islam may be chosen by consensus.

**OTHER DIFFERENCES**

- Shiites clerics generally have more authority among their followers than Sunni clerics do among theirs.
- Most Shiites reject the idea of predestination (that God has decided who is saved and who is damned), which Sunnis accept.
- Shiites allow temporary marriages and use different inheritance laws.

**Iran**

- Population: 68.3 million (2003 est.)
- Government type: Islamic republic
- Literacy rate: 79 percent
- Industries: Petroleum, textiles, construction materials, food processing
- Poverty rate: 40 percent (2002)
- Per capita GDP: $1,686 (2002)

Sources: CIA World Factbook, U.S. State Department, University of Texas Library Online, Council on Foreign Relations, World Book Encyclopedia, Economist.com
loner on a spiritual quest, avoided the powerful Montazeri.

In 1989, Baghi wrote a book that argued for an individual's right to interpret Islam. Khomeini banned it. Baghi watched as his books were shredded, boxed and carried out of Qom.

Montazeri asked to see Baghi and told the young man that he liked his book. "He was very sympathetic," Baghi recalled.

"He said, 'There are always ups and downs.' He told me, 'One day, as No. 2 in the country, I still might be sentenced to death by my own friends.'"

Behind the scenes, Montazeri had started to question the direction of the country. As its next supreme leader, he worried about the death toll from the war with Iraq. He complained about the number of people being executed in Iran. Montazeri wrote letters to Khomeini.

"I saw some flaws and faults," Montazeri recalled. "I always told him about them."

He did not see this as a change in his views. Instead, Montazeri felt he was trying to correct the direction of the republic, which he believed had veered away from the goals of the revolution and had started to repress people. As the Iraq war dragged on and the economy sputtered, others in Iran grew disenchanted as well.

In July 1988, Montazeri accused Khomeini of ordering the execution of hundreds of jailed opponents. "This genocide is incompatible with Islam," he wrote in a letter, later made public.

And then, in February 1989, to mark the 10th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, Montazeri gave a critical speech to followers in Qom.

"On many occasions we showed obstinacy, shouted slogans that frightened the world," he said. "The people of the world thought our only task in Iran was to kill people."

Along with the actions of several leading politicians, Montazeri's speech signaled that Iran's leaders were moving in a more liberal direction. But within days, Khomeini indicated where he wanted the country to go: He announced a death ruling for author Salman Rushdie, accused of defaming Islam.

The next month, Montazeri was asked to resign, and the landscape changed throughout the country. His photographs were ripped down, murals painted over. Streets, squares and hospitals were renamed.

Shortly after, Khomeini died, and President Ali Khamenei was named supreme leader.

Critics said Montazeri became outspoken only because he was bitter.

"As long as he was the deputy, he didn't criticize," recalled Hamid-Reza Taraqqi, a longtime friend of Khamenei's. "Once he lost his job and his capacity, then he started to criticize."

But Montazeri said he had always privately criticized the government. He made his complaints public only when problems were not fixed.

In spite of his critics, he soon developed a strong following. New students such as Baghi and a young cleric named Mohsen Kadivar started to come to Montazeri's office and his religious classes. They belonged to an unofficial group of people who had fought the revolution as young students but now questioned the direction of the country.

These Iranians had not turned their back on Islam, not be-
come secularists. Instead, they were Islamic intellectuals, who pushed for a new kind of Iran. They called for reform, for change from within the system.

In Montazeri, who had helped for the republic and write the constitution, these people found someone they respected.

"If he remained quiet, he would have been the successor," recalled Kadivar, who became a top student of Montazeri's. "But he rejected this in the name of human rights. It's a very great thing for me—greater than all his lessons."

Hopes for change

By the mid-1990s, many Iranians had grown frustrated with their government. In an echo of the shah's time, people complained about a ruthless dictator, a poverty that was not being allowed to dress as they pleased, to work what they wanted. But they also worried about the lack of jobs and the loss of the country's brightest to the West because they could not find good work in Iran.

And then, in 1997, a moderate cleric named Mohammad Khatami ran for president on a reformist platform. In a shock to the country's leaders, he won.

There were high hopes of a "Tehran Spring," a relaxing of all the restrictions, a warming toward the West. Reformist newspapers were planned. Reformist political parties were created.

In the new environment, certain social restrictions were eased—an unmarried man and woman could get away with holding hands. Women started to wear skimpier head scarves, often pulled back behind their ears. They dyed their hair with streaks of blond, red and silver.

Despite the optimism, it was soon clear who was really in charge. True power in Iran rested not with elected officials but with the appointed Islamic supreme leader and the appointed Council of Guardians.

The supreme leader, not the elected president, controlled the most powerful parts of the government: the judiciary, the military and much of the media. And the conservative Council of Guardians, which had veto power, screened potential candidates for office and laws passed by parliament.

After Khatami became president, Montazeri gave a lecture at his small school in Qom, questioning the authority of the supreme leader. "No government can rule by the stick any longer," he said. Although the speech was not reported in state-run media, copies of it circulated, and word of it spread. Hard-line government supporters had often ignored Montazeri. Since his removal as Khomeini's successor, the cleric had been shoved aside in the country's political scene. He was an old man with little power, the forgotten ayatollah.

But with so much change and so many ordinary Iranians pinning for a more open society, Montazeri was now seen as a real threat.

In November 1997, five days after Montazeri's lecture, a rally was held in Qom to support the supreme leader. But the rally turned violent, and the mob attacked Montazeri's school, office and home. People spray painted "Heretic of the age" on a wall. Police used tear gas on the crowd. When security forces tried to take Montazeri away, he refused, saying he would rather die in his home.

Accused of treason, Montazeri was placed under house arrest, guards stationed outside. His school was closed, relatives and followers were thrown in jail.

Other reformists in Iran continued to push the limits of the government. But there was no chance of winning.

"It was like playing chess with a gorilla," recalled Baghi, who had left the clergy to become a writer. "There were no rules."

The reformists won control of parliament, but the conservative Council of Guardians vetoed new legislation. The reformist culture minister granted new newspaper licenses, but the conservative judiciary shut many new publications—85 in all.

Hamidreza Jalalipour, a former student revolutionary, helped start 10 reformist newspapers. "All were closed," Jalalipour recalled. "They told me you are threatening the national security of Iran."

Eventually the government jailed provocative writers, including Kadivar and Baghi.

From his home, Montazeri reached out to the world. Followers launched a Montazeri Web site and published his memoirs, which accused Khomeini of personally ordering the death of thousands of opponents. With a worldwide audience, Montazeri became more popular, a symbol of the government's repression.

In January 2003, five years, two months and 10 days after being locked in his house, Montazeri was freed. Officials never gave a reason.

Protected by family members and close followers, Montazeri walked slowly to the major shrine of Qom to visit the grave of his oldest son, killed in a bombing by Marxist rebels in 1981. And then Montazeri walked back home. He would rarely leave again.

Disappointment

By this year, many people said they had lost hope. The reformist government had been unable to make real changes, and the clerics still controlled Iran. The country's love affair with Khatami was over.

Parliamentary elections were
scheduled for February, but many Iranians said they planned to skip them.

"We made a big mistake once—we voted for Khatami. We're not going to make the same mistake twice," said Suren-
na, 30, who did not want to give her last name, fearful that she would be punished for criticizing the regime.

The Council of Guardians made sure that conservatives would win the election. In one of its bloodiest moves since being es-
stablished, the council disqualified about 2,500 potential candidates, mostly reformists, even sitting members of parliament. Most were deemed un-Islamic.

Reformists called for a national protest. They held a sit-in for 25 days in a lobby area near the parliament meeting room.

On one afternoon, about 100 men and women sat in the lobby, on carpets and chairs. Hamidre-
za Jalaeipour, the former newspaper publisher, stepped up to the lectern. Jalaeipour, who teaches a class about revolution at the University of Tehran, de-

livered an unsparking assess-
ment of the Islamic Rev-
novation. He said the country now has millions of drug addicts, mil-
ions of unemployed people.

"You'll find fewer people in the mosques," he said. "They were supposed to be more crowded."

Jalaeipour talked so loudly that his voice could still be heard when his microphone stopped working. He urged the reformists to keep fighting for a free election. "If it doesn't happen, you can hold your head up and say, 'We did something,' " he yelled. "Everyone put down their newspapers and clapped."

But the streets outside were largely silent. Students did not protest as they had in recent years. They knew the reformists would lose, and they feared that the conservatives would crack down. No one talked about a rev-

olution against the clerics. And most people no longer put their faith in the reformists. Instead, many young people were re-

signed to waiting. Eventually, they would be in charge.

So in an election with few al-

ternatives, conservatives won.

"We must prove to our enemies that nothing is more important to us than Islam and the revolu-
tion," Zebesh Mozadi, 40, said as she voted. "We have so many martyrs here, we have to respect their blood."

About half of Iran's eligible voters cast ballots, the lowest turnout in parliamentary elec-
tions since the revolution but not as small as reformists had hoped. Some voters turned in blank ballots in protest.

Cleric's regrets

Montazeri, suffering from diabe-
tes and hard of hearing, now spends his days inside his house. He is not prone to long explanations and does not al-

ways answer questions, prefer-
ing to talk about what he wants. He is a man of regret.

As a younger man, Montazeri tried to expand the Islamic Rev-

olution to other countries. He

led Friday prayers and shouted "Down with the U.S.A." He sup-
ported taking hostages at the U.S. Embassy. All were wrong, he said.

"These were all mistakes, and

maybe I was one of them too, im-
pressed by the circumstances, like the occupation of the U.S. Embas-
sey," Montazeri said. "It was a mistake then, but mis-
takes prevail upon wisdom."

Ibrahim Yazdi, the country's first foreign minister, met with Montazeri in January. He com-
plicated about the Council of Guardians." Yazdi said. "I said, 'Well, that is your byproduct. You created it. You did it.' Without any hesitation, he said, 'Well, we didn't know these things. We didn't have any experience. We made a mistake.' "

Montazeri is now considered to be one of the top two Shiite leg-

eral experts in the world. He has continued to modify earlier

opinions. Women are allowed to watch him teach—a rarity in Qom. Montazeri recently said women and men can shake hands in certain situations—a liberal ruling for any Muslim cleric.

He still demands change. He wants Iran to be run according to the principles of the Islamic Revolution, which he says are freedom, democracy and Islam. He wants an elected top leader who derives his power from people, not from God.

Before the election, Montaze-

ri was courted by both reform-
ists and the government, aware that the dissenting cleric's opin-
ion could sway certain voters. Reformists asked him to say publicly whether he would cast a ballot. But he said he did not want to interfere with voting.

On election day, officials of-
fered to send a ballot box to Montazeri's house so he could easily vote. He told them not to bother. At least eight of the top 12 grand ayatollahs did not vote, protest-
ing the elections, said Grand Ayatollah Yusuf Saanei, who lives next to Montazeri.

It's not clear what the new parliament will do when it takes over in a few weeks. Some believe that conservatives will again try to crack down on so-

cial freedoms, and others believe this is impossible. "Nobody can stop these free-
doms," said Ataollah Mohajer-

ni, the former culture minister under Khatami. "Freedom is like a genie in a bottle. Once you open it, it's hard to put back in."

If the country does not continu-

ue with reform, some clerics worry about the future of Islam in Iran. They say Iran is still re-
ligious, but they fear that the Is-

lamic Republic and its vision of religion might be hurting Islam.

"If our prophet said some-
thing like what these people say—the supreme leader and his men—why would people continue to be Muslims?" asked Kadivar, an ally of Montazeri's.

"No one would want to be a cleric, and no one would want to be a student of ours."

Shortly after the election, Kadi-

var attracted 1,000 people for a speech at a Tehran community center. For three hours, he lec-
tured in his quiet voice, laying out 10 ways to identify an unjust government, starting with lack of tolerance for peaceful opposition and ending with unfair dis-
tribution of wealth. He never mentioned Iran. But the impli-
cation was clear.

Throughout the speech, peo-

ple listened quietly and took notes. One of Montazeri's grandsons, Meisam Hashemi, sat near the front, next to Kadi-

var's son.

When he was born, Hashemi was given the name "Down with the Shah," which was changed after the Shah was deposed. He is now 25, the same age as the Is-

lamic Republic. He is a religious man, but he believes religion has no place in his government. Hashemi is no revolutionary. He understands the value of mov-

ing slowly.

Montazeri wants Hashemi and his other grandsons to be-

come clerics, like all three of his sons. "After all, it is not bad to be a clergyman," Montazeri said, talking about all he has done for Islam and for people in Iran, all that the clergy can con-

tribute to the world.

But Hashemi gives the same an-

swer as Montazeri's 12 other grandsons: No.

Hashemi wants to do some-

thing with his life that could really make a difference for his family. He wants to be a crimi-

nal lawyer.
A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Across the Arab world, young people now embrace a more conservative brand of Islam, turning away from the influence of the West—even in countries like Kuwait, where education is free and comfort is fueled by oil revenue from the U.S. and Europe. A few young Kuwaiti extremists have been spurred to violence, but in most cases the allure of conservative Islam here is that it provides a network of business and social connections in addition to spiritual rewards. In the fifth part of this series, the Tribune examines the struggle for the soul of Islam among young people choosing between secular liberties and religious dictates.

By Evan Osnos
Tribune foreign correspondent

KUWAIT CITY—The gunman drove a Lexus.

Young and well-educated, Sami al-Mutairi parked his royal blue luxury sedan behind a roadside sand berm and waited. He knew that carloads of American troops traveled the dusty road. Prosecutors say he cradled an AK-47 assault rifle in his hands.

Al-Mutairi, 25, was from a large middle-class family, part of a major tribe in this gilded Persian Gulf state. He had a good government job as a social worker, and in college he had been known as an outspoken member of the liberal students group on the manicured campus of Kuwait University.

But shortly after he graduated in June 2001, something changed.

He became more stridently religious and began echoing the ideology of another wealthy Arab: Osama bin Laden. In time, al-Mutairi's once-vocal resentment of restrictive Arab culture transformed into a zealous rejection of the West's policies toward Muslims. In October 2001, he set off for Afghanistan but was turned back by Iranian authorities and returned home, fuming.

As al-Mutairi waited on the sun-soaked morning of Jan. 21, 2003, a silver SUV approached. He gripped his rifle and aimed. The slight man with the thick beard opened fire, prosecutors say, killing a U.S. Army contractor in the passenger seat and seriously wounding another American worker beside him.

The gunman—now in a Kuwaiti prison serving a life sentence for the shooting, though he maintains he is innocent—had become the third middle-class young man from this oil-rich U.S. ally to pick up a gun against Americans in just four months.

It may be possible to understand how extremism brews in a squalid Palestinian refugee camp, but what accounts for the scions of middle-class Kuwaiti families who are choosing violence and martyrdom over a future in a nation with free education, abundant oil

PLEASE SEE KUWAIT, PAGE 12
Kuwaitis socialize on the observation deck atop the Kuwait Towers. The writing on the glass tells visitors what they can see.
Movement dominates politics, life

KUWAIT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

wealth and a four-hour workday.

"They are the five-star terrorists," said Sami al-Faraj, an independent Kuwaiti defense analyst. "What makes someone who lives in a country of luxury choose to do that?"

That question gets to the heart of a broader issue that builds as the Arab world confronts a surging demographic wave of young people. With two-thirds of the population of the Middle East under age 25, many young Arabs, from Casablanca to Cairo to Kuwait City see their future not in Western-style democracy and its values, but in a return to a conservative version of Islam.

There may be no better place to explore this transformation than Kuwait, a relatively pro-Western ally where an Islamist movement from less than 25 years ago captured the imagination of a young generation that will control one of the world's most valuable silver linings.

Behind the changes in the emirate of Kuwait is a movement that grew from a ridiculed fringe of religious fundamentalists into an uninvited force in politics, culture, and neighborhood life. It is a movement powerful enough to offer young Arabs an unbeatable package: a vision of the world and the network to succeed in it.

Not only do Islamist intellectuals advocate the adoption of an Islamic state—hold the largest share of seats in Kuwait's parliament—but their influence extends to which products appear in neighborhood stores, which viewpoints are heard in classrooms and even who runs the college student union. Most important, perhaps, Islamists offer spiritual rewards.

"Young people want to add a meaning to their lives, politically. And somebody is going to organize them," said John Zogby, a Lebanese-American pollster who has surveyed Muslims around the world. "What is clear is that the fundamentalists are getting to them first. The Islamists have the energy; a voice; a message."

Islamist leaders blame the acts of extremists on the intrusion of a decadent, Western influence and a U.S. foreign policy that they say spurs some to violence. They stridently condemn the attacks, saying Islamist leaders bear no more indirect responsibility for the acts of misguided extremists than do mainstream Christian churches for attacks on abortion clinics.

But liberal Kuwaitis say the increasingly powerful movement permits extremism to simmer unchecked. They accuse Islamists of allowing fiery intolerant rhetoric to echo through mosques and youth centers, creating a fundamentalist fervor that is tantamount to sending a speeding train down the track and disavowing the result when the train crashes.

"Sometimes you just scratch your head and say, 'Where did we go wrong?'" Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Mohammed al-Sabah said in an interview. "How did this person have this hate in him to carry out such an evil deed? I cannot explain Sami Mutairi."

An unlikely backdrop

Growing up, al-Mutairi was the gregarious middle child in a large family with two mothers, a father and 21 children, not particularly unusual in the Arab countries where the Koran is interpreted to permit men to marry more than one woman. Al-Mutairi's father was a military officer.

"We were exposed to Western culture," recalled Sami's brother, Khaled, sipping espresso at Starbucks in Kuwait City, the site he chose for an interview. "I study in France. My brother Fahad studies in London. My sister lives in Italy."

It was a two-sided upbringing—a traditional polygamous household with an eye to the world beyond Kuwait—a fitting reflection of a nation that has come to typify the competing tensions in the modern Arab world. Once among the poorest nations, this former clump of hippies fishing families and pearl divers now wallows in the wealth of 10 percent of the world's oil reserves.

"Kuwait's oil was discovered in 1938, but World War II delayed development by British engineers until the 1950s. Since then, the petrodollars have carried a flood of Western culture, forging a new skyline where pale
Men mingle over a buffet dinner at a wedding reception in Kuwait City. Many young Arabs see their future in a return to a conservative version of Islam.
minarets compete with mirrored skyscrapers. It is a place of luxury SUVs, the latest wafer-thin cell phones and American fast-food joints.

Among Arabs, Kuwaitis have often stood out for their embrace of the West and its culture, and at times that has made them a target of ridicule—and worse.

In the 1920s, Saudis attempted to invade Kuwait, denouncing their neighbors for using tobacco and working with the West. And a dozen years after U.S.-led troops expelled Iraqi invaders, Kuwait remains one of the few pro-American refuges in the Muslim world.

Against that history, recent years have produced a startling pattern: Two of Osama bin Laden's top deputies were Kuwait-born. Twelve Kuwait nationals are among the nearly 600 detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, accused of aiding the Taliban or Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. An additional 20 Kuwaitis, including al-Mutairi, have been arrested on charges of shooting or plotting to kill Americans in the past two years.

As he entered college, al-Mutairi did not seem headed toward militancy. "He was an open-minded guy," recalled Ahmed Abdullah Essa, a classmate. "He used to believe that classes should be [kept] coed. He marched for women's right to vote."

Shortly after enrolling at Kuwait University in the fall of 1997, al-Mutairi established himself in the on-campus liberal party, known as the Center. The group had been struggling for two decades while the campus emerged as the vanguard of the nation's Islamist movement, with a conservative student party, the Alliance, dominating elections.

In al-Mutairi's junior year, he and two other members of the liberal party were accused of putting up posters that criticized the Prophet Muhammad. Police detained them for questioning when they were released two or three days later, the students boldly staged a news conference to proclaim their innocence and to criticize the government for inflicting emotional pain on their families.

Later that year, buoyed by the publicity, al-Mutairi ran in a student election on the liberal ticket. He lost.

The Islamist revival

"I remember when the Islamist movement in Kuwait was 50 people," Tareq al-Suwaidan said with a laugh. As a student living abroad in the '70s, al-Suwaidan, now an Islamist lecturer, helped found the Alliance.

In the 1980s and most of the '90s, men and women at Kuwait University dined and danced together, and miniskirts were more common than traditional hijab head coverings, professors and alumni say.

But the Islamists were both patient and shrewd. As in much of the Middle East,
Kuwait

Population (2003): 2.4 million (including about 1.5 million non-Kuwaiti citizens)

Percent Muslim: 85 (of that, 70 percent Sunni, 30 percent Shiite)

Government type: Constitutional hereditary emirate

Literacy rate: 84 percent

Legal system: Civil system, with Islamic law significant in personal matters

Industry: World's seventh leading petroleum exporter at 2 million barrels per day

Per capita GDP: $14,234 (2002)

With prominent perches like the co-ops, Islamists cut an alluring profile. Like having an Ivy League connection in the U.S., knowing the right Islamist in Kuwait can reap tangible rewards.

Othman al-Abdulhadi, 43, knows firsthand. Years ago, as a high school sophomore with a budding Muslim devotion, he drew the attention of members of the Brotherhood, who approached him at the mosque. They invited him to lunch and a ride in a Mercedes, he said. In time, they invited him on weekend trips to seaside chalets.

"I was from a poor family, and I had never had experiences like that," said al-Abdulhadi, now a public-relations manager. He was a member of the Brotherhood for 10 years before growing disenchanted and breaking ties in 1989.

When he had trouble finding work, he says, they got him a job at a construction company, arranged by a prominent Islamist legislator. When he wanted to go to college, they helped ensure that he was accepted, he recalls.

Islamist leaders now hold top posts at the Justice Ministry, the teachers union and a network of profitable neighborhood shopping centers.

"Tell my students: If you really want to get the right job after you graduate, you stand the best chance if you are an Islamist," said Shamlan al-Essa, director of the Center for Strategic and Future Studies in Kuwait.

Reaching youth

The Islamist message is amplified by a network of popular Islamist youth groups for middle and high school students that attract members through after-school soccer games and other activities.

"If you like sports, that's how we bring you in," said Fahad Mohammed al-Thuwainy, 18, a member of two such groups, Guiding Light and Future...
Oil changed nation's fortunes

1939 Shiek Mubarak al-Sabah signs a treaty making Kuwait a British protectorate.

1930s Large quantities of oil are discovered beneath the Kuwaiti desert.

1940s After the end of World War II, Kuwait becomes a major petroleum exporter, which changes it from a very poor land to a very rich one.

1961 On June 19, Kuwait becomes fully independent from Britain.

1962 The Kuwaiti Constitution is approved.

1987 Kuwaiti oil tankers in the Persian Gulf are refagged with U.S. markings and escorted by U.S. warships for protection during the Iran-Iraq War.

1990 Iraq invades and occupies Kuwait, claiming it as an Iraqi province. During the occupation, Kuwaiti leaders flee to Saudi Arabia, Britain and other countries.

1991 A U.S.-led coalition drives Iraq out of Kuwait. Retreating Iraqi forces set fire to or damage about 750 Kuwaiti oil wells.

2003 Kuwait becomes an important staging area for coalition forces in Operation Iraqi Freedom. It also contributes hundreds of millions of dollars to the war and reconstruction efforts.

Sources: U.S. State Department, World Book Online, Statesman's Yearbook 2003

Chicago Tribune
Men monitor the boards during a trading session on the floor of the Kuwait Stock Exchange. Once among the poorest nations, Kuwait has 10 percent of the world’s oil reserves.
The sun rises over an oil refinery in Kuwait. Money from oil, which was discovered in the 1930s, has since brought luxury sport-utility vehicles, the latest wafer-thin cell phones and American fast-food joints.

tual part of Islam,” said Osama Isa al-Shaheen, 25, a government lawyer who headed the Alliance before he graduated from Kuwait University four years ago. “It’s about organizations, activities, work.”

Mohammad Dallal, another lawyer and former president of the Alliance, says Islamists have perfected their recruiting system.

“We succeed here because we fulfill the Kuwaitis’ needs,” he said. “We are Muslims, we respect religion, we allow a little freedom. We are in the mosques. We are in the charities, we are very close to the people. And the result is that you see it in the student unions, in the teachers.”

At Kuwait University, Islamist students cheered the end of coed classes, phased out over the past few years on the 18,000-student campus. They pushed for a conservative dress code, advocated the national adoption of Saudi-style Shariah law and denounced U.S.-led military actions in Afghanistan.

“The perception that we are very similar [to Western young people] is superficial,” Ahmed al-Mutawa, vice chairman of the student union last year, said one evening at the student union’s warren of tidy offices, housed in a marble-trimmed student meeting hall. “It is not an accurate perception. That is the shell. It is not the heart.”

Ahmed al-Obaid, outgoing treasurer of the student union and a member of the Alliance, said he believes Kuwait should codify a strict interpretation, Saudi-style, of Islamic law — a move the ruling family has so far resisted.

Al-Obaid is much like others in the Alliance. In one breath, he recalls spending two months studying English in Irvine, Calif., and in the next, he reports that he stands “with the Iraqi resistance against the U.S. occupation” and that nothing would make him happier than dying as a martyr in a war to destroy the state of Israel.

“I’m a Muslim first and a Kuwaiti second,” he said.

While the Islamists dominate, a small but growing movement of Kuwaitis is straining to challenge their views.

Faraah al-Saqqaq, a writer and liberal activist, has organized groups of young people, including her 19-year-old daughter, to come together to perform community service, find summer jobs and show a united front for more tolerant viewpoints.

“People like me, over the years, we were surrendering to the fundamentalists,” al-Saqqaq said. “But after Sept. 11, I said I can’t allow it to go on any more. I cannot surrender to them.”

Like many of the students in the summer program, Zainab Karam, 22, has come to see the Islamist youth movement as a challenge to her independence. She hopes to work as a radio broadcaster someday, and she worries that a political move-
A Kuwaiti official inspects the crime scene near Camp Doha outside Kuwait City where, prosecutors say, Sami al-Mutairi killed an American contractor and wounded another on Jan. 21, 2003.

"I think religion is in your heart," she said. "If you believe it, you believe it. But you cannot force people to believe it like you."

Intolerant rhetoric

Many Kuwaitis admit to feeling conflicted about their close embrace of the West and its material trappings at a time when much of the Arab world is fiercely opposed to U.S. foreign policy. Islamists have deftly managed that tension to their advantage.

"When they vote for Islamists, it is an expression of their hate for America and America's biased policies in the Middle East," said Abdulrazzaq al-Shalij, a Salafi political strategist. "They see truth and credibility in the Islamist movement, which is a defense against the cultural invasion of the West."

Liberals say sentiments like that hint at a creeping intolerance in the Islamists' rhetoric.

The message is fiercer when it is not intended for Western eyes and ears.

In an Arabic-language newspaper column in July 2003, a prominent Islamist cleric criticized the U.S. ambassador to Kuwait for visiting traditional Kuwaiti evening meetings, known as diwaniyas, saying his presence could induce a misguided young person to "pick up a weapon."

"We see it every day, the intimidation to hate others, to discriminate against foreigners," said liberal activist Ahmed Bishara. "We see it in articles in the newspapers, in seminars by Islamic fundamentalists from the mosque's pulpit. And there are many people who are weak and they respond."

Like other Arab governments that have survived decades of regional turmoil, Kuwait's monarchy is adept at pulling Islamist forces closer to gain religious legitimacy and push them away when they encroach on power. These days, leaders describe the flourishing fundamentalism as a hallmark of freedom.

"I don't see fundamentalism as extremism," said al-Sabah, the foreign minister. "You have a right to be fundamentalist. I have dealt with elements of society who are very fundamentalist when it comes to observance of Islam, but they confine it to themselves. Extremism is when you try to impose your views on others."

But as a stack of court cases confirms, some Kuwaitis are choosing a path of militancy and violence.

In October 2003, two Kuwaiti men who had fought in Afghanistan opened fire on Marines training on an island, killing one U.S. serviceman and wounding another. Investigators said the gunmen, Anas al-Kandari and Jassem al-Hajiri, who died in a shootout with Marines, had returned to Kuwait intending to establish a cell of Al Qaeda that could attack U.S. and foreign-linked targets here.

The gunmen—one of whom had recently bought a Porsche—left a will, portraying their attack against the Marines as retribution for the suffering of Palestinians.

Investigators arrested 12 young men—mostly unmarried college students—on charges of conspiring in the shooting plot. Earlier this year, seven were convicted in the case and sentenced to jail, fines or probation. Five were acquitted.

Western diplomats believe that in total, 46 Kuwaitis trained or fought in Afghanistan and have returned home to nurture a following of an estimated 400 disciples. But Kuwaiti leaders downplay them as isolated cases.

Jan. 21, 2003

Few cases have sparked as much soul searching in Kuwaiti newspapers and on television as the story of Sami al-Mutairi.

In the months after graduation, al-Mutairi lost touch with his old friends from the Center. He began work as a counselor at a state-run orphanage and stopped visiting a hangout decked in American kitsch where classmates said he once thrilled away the afternoon with them, smoking flavored tobacco.

Nobody can say for sure what prompted the change. Some old classmates wondered whether his arrest for criticizing the Prophet Muhammad had soured him on liberal politics. Others wondered whether he had encountered a new imam at the mosque, though he did not mention any specifically, his lawyer and brother say.

Whatever the source, his brother approved of the change.

"The fact that he worked in the orphanage made him think of the need to do good deeds. How can he be useful for people all over the world," Khaled said. "Sometimes, you just make a decision. It is part of growing up."

And then came Sept. 11. Those closest to al-Mutairi recall different reactions. Khaled said he and his brother were similarly dismayed by the deaths of civilians.

"However, at the same time, we did not approve of what happens in Palestine," he said. "And we thought that what happened on the 11th of September was the same as what happened in Palestine, and that is a crime against humanity."

Sami's lawyer, Mohammed al-Mutairi, who has no relation, said his client was inspired by bin Laden. "Ever since Sept. 11, when he saw Osama bin Laden and began to learn about what sort of man he is—how he leaves his wealthy life and his fortune—he saw him as a leader of Muslims and Arabs," the lawyer said.

On Oct. 21, Sami al-Mutairi set off for Afghanistan, telling his family he was going to do charity work. Stalled for weeks at the Iranian border, he met an older Kuwaiti who lived as a shepherd with three wives and 30 children in the desert south of Kuwait City. In their encounter, prosecutors say, a plan was born.

Kuwaiti authorities regularly scrutinize anyone who has tried to reach Afghanistan, and when al-Mutairi returned from the border, he was arrested. Authorities seized his passport.

After his release, al-Mutairi called his friend Abdullah Amer al-Oteibi and asked him to teach him how to shoot, prosecutors say. Together they trained in the desert near the Kuwait City suburb of Farwaniya. Al-Mutairi, meanwhile, scouted out a remote intersection near Camp Doha, a major U.S. Army base in Kuwait.

On the morning of Jan. 21, al-Mutairi arrived at the intersection shortly after 8, according to a videotaped confession. Within the hour, a Toyota SUV approached, driven by David Cara-
way, a software engineer from Tapestry Solutions in San Diego. In the passenger seat was Michael Rene Pouliot, 46, an executive from the same company who was working for the Army.

The car slowed to the light, and al-Mutairi opened fire, prosecutors say Pouliot died in a rain of gunfire; Caraway was struck seven times but survived.

Al-Mutairi ran back to his sedan and headed for a place in the desert, where he buried his clothes, then visited several mosques, investigators say. He arrived at work in time for his evening shift but didn’t stay long. He called a friend and asked for a ride to the Saudi border. The friend dropped him off with no possessions but a pistol.

Police, meanwhile, were searching for all those who had tried to visit Afghanistan and had discovered al-Mutairi’s disappearance. They searched his office and found stashed in an air duct ammunition and an AK-47—a weapon that matched the bullets found at the scene, prosecutors say.

Saudi border guards arrested al-Mutairi hours later. He gave a videotaped confession, but his attorney, Mohammed al-Mutairi, says his client was tortured during an interrogation that lasted 15 hours.

He says his client was fingered for the crime because he was a known Islamist at a moment when Kuwait was eager to please the U.S. forces streaming into the country for the looming war in Iraq. At the time of his arrest, al-Mutairi says, he was trying to perform a pilgrimage to Mecca and entered Saudi Arabia illegally only because Kuwaiti authorities had taken his passport.

After a trial largely closed to the public, al-Mutairi was convicted a year ago and sentenced to death by hanging. An appeals court later commuted the sentence to life in prison. In convicting him, the court cited physical evidence gathered from the scene and the car.

Khaled al-Mutairi believes his brother, now 27, is innocent and was tarred as a terrorist for attempting to visit Afghanistan. “He believed that violence did not solve problems,” Khaled said.

But investigators paint a different portrait of a frustrated and zealous young convert to radical Islam who was inspired by Al Qaeda.

Portions of his videotaped confession were played in court, and attorneys for both sides described its contents. At one point, an interrogator asks Sami al-Mutairi why he chose that particular day for the shooting. It was simple, he is said to have replied. The attack on the World Trade Center occurred on a Tuesday. The June 25, 1996, bombing of the Khobar Towers that killed 19 U.S. troops occurred on a Tuesday.

“That day,” he said, “is blessed.”
A rare look at secretive Brotherhood in America

A group aiming to create Islamic states worldwide has established roots here, in large part under the guidance of Egypt-born Ahmed Elkadi.

By Noreen S. Ahmed-Ullah, Sam Roe and Laurie Cohen Tribune staff reporters

Over the last 40 years, small groups of devout Muslim men have gathered in homes in U.S. cities to pray, memorize the Koran and discuss events of the day.

But they also addressed their ultimate goal, one so controversial that it is a key reason they have operated in secrecy: to create Muslim states overseas and, they hope, someday in America as well.

These men are part of an underground U.S. chapter of the international Muslim Brotherhood, the world's most influential Islamic fundamentalist group and an organization with a violent past in the Middle East. But fearing persecution, they rarely identify themselves as Brotherhood members and have operated largely behind the scenes, unknown even to many Muslims.

Still, the U.S. Brotherhood has had a significant and ongoing impact on Islam in America, helping establish mosques, Islamic schools, summer youth camps and prominent Muslim organizations. It is a major factor, Islamic scholars say, in why many Muslim institutions in the nation have become more conservative in recent decades.

Leading the U.S. Brotherhood during much of this period was Ahmed Elkadi, an Egyptian-born surgeon and a former personal physician to Saudi Arabia's King Faisal. He headed the group from 1984 to 1994 but abruptly lost his leadership po-

A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

The Muslim Brotherhood is a key chapter in any story about the struggle for the soul of Islam. Formed in Egypt in 1928, the Brotherhood spawned generations of Islamic activists, both peaceful and violent, around the globe. It is the most influential Islamic fundamentalist organization in the world.

In the U.S. it has operated legally but covertly, mimicking clandestine fraternal organizations that operate on a nod and a secret handshake. Even today, few outside the Islamic inner circles from which it recruits know when, how often or where the Brothers meet to discuss the organization's abstract but pervasive goal: the creation of Islamic states throughout the world, including the U.S.
Muslims divided on Brotherhood

ISLAM
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

situation. Now he is discussing his life and the U.S. Brotherhood for the first time.

His story, combined with details from documents and interviews, offers an unprecedented look at the Brotherhood in America: how the group recruited members, how it cloaked itself in secrecy and how it alienated many moderate Muslims.

Indeed, because of its hardline beliefs, the U.S. Brotherhood has been an increasingly divisive force within Islam in America, fueling the often bitter struggle between moderate and conservative Muslims.

Many Muslims believe that the Brotherhood is a noble international movement that supports the true teachings of Islam and unwaveringly defends Muslims who have come under attack around the world, from Chechens to Palestinians to Iraqis. But others view it as an extreme organization that breeds intolerance and militancy.

"They have this idea that Muslims come first, not that humans come first," says Mustafa Saled, 32, a Floridian who left the U.S. Brotherhood in 1998.

While separation of church and state is a bedrock principle of American democracy, the international Brotherhood preaches that religion and politics cannot be separated and that governments eventually should be Islamic. The group also champions martyrdom and jihad, or holy war, as a means of self-defense and has provided the philosophical underpinnings for Muslim militants worldwide.

Many moderate Muslims in America are uncomfortable with the views preached at mosques influenced by the Brotherhood, scholars say. Those experts point to a 2001 study sponsored by four Muslim advocacy and religious groups that found that only a third of U.S. Muslims attend mosques.

In suburban Bridgeview, Ill., some moderates say they quit attending the Mosque Foundation because the leadership became too conservative and dominated by Brotherhood members.

Documents obtained by the Tribune and translated from Arabic show that the U.S. Brotherhood has been careful to obscure its beliefs from outsiders. One document tells leaders to be cautious when screening potential recruits. If the recruit asks whether the leader is a Brotherhood member, the leader should respond, "You may deduce the answer to that with your own intelligence."

Islamic state a long-term goal

Brotherhood members emphasize that they follow the laws of the nations in which they operate. They stress that they do not believe in overthrowing the U.S. government, but rather that they want as many people as possible to convert to Islam so that one day—perhaps generations from now—a majority of Americans will support a society governed by Islamic law. Muslims make up less than 3 percent of the U.S. population, but estimates of their number vary widely from 2 million to 7 million.

Federal authorities say they have scrutinized the U.S. Broth-
Muslim Brotherhood supporters throng to the November 2002 funeral in Cairo of Mustafa Mashhour, who had led the Brotherhood since 1996. Mashhour, 81, joined the group as a teen.
erhood for years. Agents currently are investigating whether people with ties to the group have raised and laundered money to finance terrorism abroad. No terrorism-related charges have been filed.

Former leader Elkadi, who has been questioned at length by federal authorities about the inner workings of the Brotherhood, says the group has served Muslims in the United States well. He personally helped establish an Islamic community in the Florida Panhandle, with a mosque, school and health clinic. And though he eventually lost it all—even his medical license—some Muslims still view him as a great Islamic leader.

"Islam is for everyone," he says. "It's good for America, good for Muslims too. ... It's good knowledge, and good knowledge should be available to everyone."

Mohammed Mahdi Akef, head of the international Muslim Brotherhood, based in Egypt, lauds Elkadi and the activities of the U.S. Brotherhood.

"They have succeeded in saving the younger generations from melting into the American lifestyle without faith," he says. "They have saved their children."

Once one of America's most influential Muslims, Elkadi now spends most of his days in front of the TV in his two-bedroom condominium in Sterling, Va., across the Potomac River from Washington.

Earlier this year he was diagnosed with a neurological disorder that affects motor skills, speech and memory. He often has difficulty expressing himself and seldom speaks more than two sentences at a time. Sometimes, he says, he smiles for no reason other than to try to remain cheerful.

But on many days his memory is clear, and his statements about the major events of the U.S. Brotherhood have been confirmed by others associated with the group.

Elkadi, a 64-year-old with a closely trimmed white beard, says he is willing to speak about the Brotherhood because he believes he has nothing to hide. Both he and his wife, Iman, 60, say they have devoted much of their lives to the Brotherhood, and Elkadi says the reason for that is simple: "It's genetic."

Both of their fathers were early Brotherhood leaders in Egypt, where the group began in 1928 as an opposition movement to the British-backed Egyptian monarchy. Its founder and leader was schoolteacher Hassan al-Banna, who advocated a return to fundamental Islam as a way to reform Muslim societies and expel Western troops.

The Brotherhood slogan became "Allah is our goal; the Messenger is our model; the Koran is our constitution; jihad is our means; and martyrdom in the way of Allah is our aspiration."

When Egypt imprisoned and executed some Muslim Brothers in the 1950s, many members fled the country and helped spread the philosophy throughout the Arab world. The group's ideological voice became philosopher Sayyid Qutb, who abhorred Western values and believed the Koran justified violence to overthrow un-Islamic governments.

Over time, the Brotherhood gained notoriety for repeatedly attempting to overthrow the Egyptian and Syrian governments and for spawning violent groups, including the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Palestinian group Hamas.

Today the Brotherhood remains based in Egypt, where it
Brotherhood has grown in influence

The Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt more than seven decades ago, is among the most powerful political forces in the Islamic world today.

1928
The Muslim Brotherhood is formed in Egypt by Hassan al-Banna to promote a return to fundamental, Islamic beliefs and practices and to fight Western colonialism in the Islamic world.

Late 1930s
The Brotherhood starts forming affiliated chapters in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria.

Image of Hassan al-Banna courtesy Encyclopedia of the Orient

Sources: Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, Encyclopedia Britannica, World Book, Tribune reporting, news reports

Chicago Tribune

1948
The Brotherhood is implicated in the assassination of Egyptian Prime Minister Mahmud Nuqrahi, who had banned the group. Al-Banna denies involvement.

1949
The Egyptian government retaliates for Nuqrahi’s assassination by killing al-Banna.

1954
A Brotherhood member tries to assassinate Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and fails. Nasser executes several of the group’s leaders and incarcerares thousands of its followers.

1962
The Cultural Society is created as the first Brotherhood organization in the United States. Society members help establish numerous Islamic organizations, mosques and schools.

A mob gathers around the burning headquarters of the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo after setting it on fire in retaliation for the attempted assassination of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1954.

1966
Sayyid Qutb, a Brotherhood ideologue who urged Muslims to take up arms against non-Islamic governments, is executed by Nasser’s regime.

1968
In Hamah, Syria, at least 10,000 people are killed by government troops suppressing an uprising by the Brotherhood.

1982
The Muslim American Society, initially based in Illinois and now in Virginia, is created to be a more public face of the Brotherhood in the U.S.

2001
The U.S. names Brotherhood member Youssef Nada and his Swiss-based investment network, allegedly established with backing from the Brotherhood, as terrorist financiers. Nada denies any terrorist links.

2002
Tens of thousands of Brotherhood supporters fill the streets of Cairo during a funeral for group leader Mustafa Mashour on Nov. 15.

2003
U.S. authorities investigating alleged terrorism funding describe Virginia businessman Sollimon Biheir as the Brotherhood’s “financial toehold” in the U.S. Biheir denies any terrorist links.

2004
The Egyptian government rounds up dozens of Brotherhood supporters, freezes members’ assets and ousts one of its backers from parliament.
officially is banned but is tolerated. The group has renounced violence and now largely organizes political protests, runs professional unions and operates charities, providing social services that the government does not. Brotherhood supporters hold 15 of the 445 seats in the Egyptian parliament.

And while Brotherhood activities vary from country to country, and chapters are officially independent, international leaders in Egypt say that all chapters are united in their beliefs and that the Egyptian office gives them advice.

In recent months Akef, the international Brotherhood leader, repeatedly has praised Palestinian and Iraqi suicide bombers, called for the destruction of Israel and asserted that the United States has no proof that Al Qaeda was to blame for the Sept. 11 attacks.

Iman Elkadi’s father, Mahmoud Abu Saud, was particularly involved in the Brotherhood’s beginnings in Egypt and remains well-known in the Arab world. An accomplished economist, he is widely regarded as a pioneer in Islamic banking, which requires that interest not be charged for loans.

He also was jailed repeatedly for his Brotherhood activities. “My grandfather would tell me that if my dad didn’t come home for dinner, he would send someone to check the jail,” Iman Elkadi recalls.

The Elkadi and Abu Saud families were linked in marriage in 1953 after Ahmed Elkadi, then a 22-year-old preparing to go into the Egyptian military, ran into his future father-in-law at a mutual friend’s office. When the young Elkadi learned that Abu Saud had an unmarried daughter, he inquired about her. The father, familiar with the young man’s family and its devotion to the Brotherhood, invited him to their home.

Soon after, the families arranged for Ahmed and Iman to marry. The wedding was held in Cairo, in a grandparent’s garden. Only relatives were invited, though others were keenly interested. Soon afterward, Egyptian intelligence officials called the couple in for questioning.

Iman Elkadi says, “They asked my husband, ‘Couldn’t you find anybody else to marry except Mahmoud Abu Saud’s daughter?’”

A mission in U.S.

The Elkadi arrived in the United States in 1987, settling in the small Louisiana city of Monroe, where Ahmed Elkadi continued his medical training at a local hospital. By then the Muslim Brotherhood already was operating in the United States, though secretly.

A U.S. chapter of the Brotherhood, documents and interviews show, was formed in the early 1980s after hundreds of young Muslims came to the U.S. to study, particularly at large Midwestern universities, such as Illinois, Indiana and Michigan. Some belonged to the Brotherhood in their homelands and wanted to spread its ideology here.

But to protect themselves and their relatives back home from possible persecution, they publicly called themselves the Cultural Society and not the Brotherhood.

Many young Muslim professionals joined, including Elkadi. One of his daughters, Mona, recalls that when she was a teen, she often fielded phone calls from women who did not know that their husbands were in the Brotherhood and wondered where they were on a given night.

She says the husbands “put the fear of God in me about keeping this a secret. I’d get lectures from some of the men about how I was going to expose them.”

Not anyone could join the Brotherhood. The group had a carefully detailed strategy on how to find and evaluate potential members, according to a Brotherhood instructional booklet for recruiters.

Leaders would scout mosques, Islamic classes and Muslim organizations for those with orthodox religious beliefs consistent with Brotherhood views, the booklet says. The leaders then would invite them to join a smaller prayer group, or urdu, Arabic for “family.” The prayer groups were a defining feature of the Brotherhood and one created by al-Banna in Egypt.

But leaders initially would not reveal the purpose of the prayer groups, and recruits were asked not to tell anyone about the meetings. If recruits asked about a particular meeting to which they were not invited, they should respond, “Make it a habit not to meddle in that which does not concern you.”

Leaders were told that during prayer meetings they should focus on fundamentals, including “the primary goal of the Brotherhood: setting up the rule of God upon the Earth.”

After assessing the recruits’ “commitment, loyalty and obedience” to Brotherhood ideals, the leaders would invite suitable candidates to join. New members, according to the booklet, would be told that they now were part of the worldwide Brotherhood and that membership “is not a personal honor but a charge to sacrifice all that one has for the sake of raising the banner of Islam.”

Mustafa Saeed, the Floridian who left the Brotherhood six years ago, recalls how he was recruited in 1994 while a junior at the University of Tennessee. After Saeed attended numerous prayer sessions, a fellow Muslim student took him to a quiet corner of a campus cafeteria and asked him to join.

“It was a dream, because that’s what you’re conditioned to do—to really love the Rkhwan,” Saeed says, using the Arabic term for Brothers or Brotherhood.

After he joined, he learned the names of other local members. “I was shocked,” he says. “These people had really hid the fact that they were Brotherhood.”

He says he found out that the U.S. Brotherhood had a plan for achieving Islamic rule in America: It would convert Americans to Islam and elect like-minded Muslims to political office.

“They’re very smart. Everyone else is gullible,” Saeed says. “If the Brotherhood puts up somebody for an election, Muslims would vote for him not knowing he was with the Brotherhood.”

Saeed says he left the group after several years because he disliked its anti-American sentiments.

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ments and its support for violence in the Middle East.

"With the extreme element," he says, "you never know when that ticking time bomb will go off."

By the 1970s, Elkadi had moved to Missouri and, he says, become treasurer of the U.S. Brotherhood, collecting money from members from across the country. His wife was the unofficial bookkeeper, tracking who was behind on dues.

Members were required to pay 3 percent of their income per year, with the money going to travel, books and annual conferences, the Elkadis say. The conferences were held under the Cultural Society name, usually in large hotels and always on Memorial Day weekend. They were invitation-only, with word spread through the prayer groups. Some years, up to 1,000 people attended; every other year, elections were held.

While the U.S. Brotherhood was influential from its beginning—in 1963 it helped establish the Muslim Students Association, one of the first national Islamic groups in the U.S.—Elkadi thought the group could expand its reach.

And when he was elected president in 1984, he vowed to do just that.

Executing his strategy

Elkadi had a strategy to make America more Islamic that reflected a long-standing Brotherhood belief: First you change the person, then the family, then the community, then the nation. By 1990, U.S. Brotherhood members had made headway on that plan by helping establish many mosques and Islamic organizations. Some of those efforts were backed financially by the ultraconservative Saudi Arabian government, which shared some of the Brotherhood's fundamentalist goals.

Elkadi himself helped create several noted Islamic organizations, including the Muslim Youth of North America, which attempted to draw thousands of high school students to Islam by sponsoring soccer teams, providing scholarships and offering a line of clothing. He served as president of the North American Islamic Trust, a group that helped build and preserve mosques.

Some of those organizations eventually would distance themselves from the Brotherhood. The Islamic Society of North America, the umbrella group for the Muslim Youth of North America and the Muslim Students Association, says Brotherhood members helped form those groups but that their overall influence has been limited.

Groups that the Brotherhood helped form printed Islamic books, many of which were distributed at mosques and on college campuses. They included Sayyid Qutb's "In the Shade of the Koran" and "Milestones," which urge jihad, martyrdom and the creation of Islamic states. Scholars came to view his writings as manifestos for Islamic militants.

"These books had questionable paradigms, especially a dichotomous division between 'us' and 'them,'" says Umar Faruq Abdallah, a noted Islamic scholar who heads a Muslim educational group in suburban Chicago. "It was very harmful. It helped to create a countercultural attitude in our community."

Inamul Haq, professor of religion at Benedictine University in Lisle, Ill., says the U.S. Brotherhood pushed Islam in a conservative direction. "They were in a position to define American Islam. Since they were well-connected in the Middle East, they were able to bring money to build various institutions."

Without the Brotherhood, he says, "We would have seen a more American Islamic culture rather than a foreign community living in the United States."

In his own community, Elkadi practiced what he preached. After moving to Panama City, Fla., in 1979, he borrowed $2.4 million from a Luxembourg bank managed by his father-in-law, Abu Saud, the early Brotherhood leader; and built a large Islamic medical center just outside of town, real estate records show.

Called the Akbar Clinic, the two-story brick building had a surgery center, an emergency room and dental, psychiatry, nutrition and acupuncture services.

Inside the clinic, Elkadi set up a small mosque and an Islamic school. The school occupied several rooms on the second floor until the students became too loud and classes had to be moved to a trailer on clinic grounds.

In many eyes, Elkadi was a
true Muslim leader.

"Everyone flocked to him whenever there was a problem," says Aly Shaaban, a Muslim leader in Panama City. "He was a father figure. He had this magnetism. You see his face and you just want to kiss his face."

A life's work in ruins

But things were beginning to unravel for Elkadi. By 1986 he had lost virtually everything he had worked for: his clinic, the school, his medical license and the presidency of the U.S. Brotherhood.

First to go was the clinic. Elkadi had fallen behind on the bills, and by 1988 creditors had won thousands of dollars in judgments against him. To prevent a sheriff’s sale, the Islamic bank in Luxembourg took over the property, and eventually it was sold to a drug rehabilitation clinic.

But Elkadi faced an even more serious professional problem: Florida regulators started disciplinary action against him for performing unnecessary surgeries at a Panama City hospital and for doing major operations, including a mastectomy at his clinic without proper precautions, such as an adequate blood supply.

Regulators determined that Elkadi had performed unneeded stomach surgery on nine patients. The Florida Board of Medicine concluded that Elkadi "exhibited a total lack of judgment" and was "not a competent physician." The board revoked his license in 1992.

At the time, Elkadi adamantly denied the allegations and accused Florida regulators of being "grossly unfair," according to filings with the state.

By the mid-1990s, his problems deepened. Not only was he forced to close his now-over-crowded and dilapidated school because of financial difficulties, he learned that Brotherhood leaders wanted him out as president.

It remains unclear why he lost his position. Current and former Brotherhood members say they do not know or that Elkadi simply was voted out of office. Elkadi and his wife say he was removed because he was not conservative enough. They say he had been pushing for women and other Islamic groups to be more involved in the Brotherhood, and some members did not like that.

"For some members, it's a very ingrown type of mentality," Iman Elkadi says. "You work only among Muslims, don't contact non-Muslims; so that your work is limited to a small circle." She says the Elkadis believed that "the message of Islam is for everybody."

Elkadi's daughter says he took this and other rejections hard. Elkadi now says he is not angry about his ouster and still loves the organization and its members. "They are good people because they follow Islam," he says.

A change of face

In recent years, the U.S. Brotherhood operated under the name Muslim American Society, according to documents and interviews. One of the nation's major Islamic groups, it was incorporated in Illinois in 1993 after a contentious debate among Brotherhood members.

Some wanted the Brotherhood to remain underground, while others thought a more public face would make the group more influential. Members from across the country drove to regional meeting sites to discuss the issue.

Former member Mustafa Saied recalls how he gathered with 40 others at a Days Inn on the Alabama-Tennessee border. Many members, he says, preferred secrecy, particularly in case U.S. authorities cracked down on Hamas supporters, including many Brotherhood members.

"They were looking at doomsday scenarios," he says.

When the leaders voted, it was decided that Brotherhood members would call themselves the Muslim American Society or MAS, according to documents and interviews.

They agreed not to refer to themselves as the Brotherhood but to be more publicly active. They eventually created a Web site and for the first time invited the public to some conferences, which also were used to raise money. The organization papers would list Elkadi—just months away from his ouster—as a director.

Elkadi and Mohammed Mahdi Akef, a Brotherhood leader in Egypt and now the international head, had pushed for more openness. In fact, Akef says he helped found MAS by lobbying for the change during trips to the U.S.

"We have a religion, message, morals and principals that we want to carry to the people as God ordered us," he says. "So why should we work in secrecy?"

But U.S. members would remain guarded about their identity and beliefs.

An undated internal memo instructed MAS leaders on how to deal with inquiries about the new organization. If asked, "Are you the Muslim Brotherhood?" leaders should respond that they are an independent group called the Muslim American Society. "It is a self-explanatory name that does not need further
Iman Elkadi orders dinner last week for her husband, Ahmed, at a mall near their home in northern Virginia. Ahmed Elkadi led the U.S. Muslim Brotherhood for a decade before he was ousted in 1994. Both the Elkadis' fathers were leaders of the group in Egypt.

And if the topic of terrorism were raised, leaders were told to say that they were against terrorism but that jihad was among a Muslim's "divine legal rights" to be used to defend himself and his people and to spread Islam.

But MAS leaders say those documents and others obtained by the Tribune are either outdated or do not accurately reflect the views of the group's leaders.

MAS describes itself as a "charitable, religious, social, cultural and educational not-for-profit organization." It has headquarters in Alexandria, Va., and 53 chapters nationwide, including one in Bridgeview, across the street from the mosque there.

Shaker Elsayed, a top MAS official, says the organization was founded by Brotherhood members but has evolved to include Muslims from various backgrounds and ideologies.

"Ikhwan (Brotherhood) members founded MAS, but MAS went way beyond that point of conception," he says.

Now, he says, his group has no connection with the Brotherhood and disagrees with the international organization on many issues.

But he says that MAS, like the Brotherhood, believes in the teachings of Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna, which are "the closest reflection of how Islam should be in this life."

"I understand that some of our members may say, 'Yes, we are Ikhwan,'" Elsayed says. But, he says, MAS is not administered from Egypt. He adds, "We are not your typical Ikhwan."

MAS says it has about 10,000 members and that any Muslim
governments in Muslim lands. The group's goal in the United States, he says, "is to serve and develop the Muslim community and help Muslims to be the best citizens they can be of this country." That includes preserving the Muslim identity, particularly among youths.

MAS collected $2.8 million in dues and donations in 2003—more than 10 times the amount in 1997, according to Internal Revenue Service filings.

Spending often is aimed at schools, teachers and children, the filings show. The group has conducted teacher training programs, issued curriculum guides and established youth centers. It also set up Islamic American University, largely a correspondence school with an office in suburban Detroit, to train teachers and preachers.

Until 16 months ago, the university's chairman was Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a prominent cleric in Qatar and a spiritual figure of the Brotherhood who has angered many in the West by praising suicide bombers in Israel and Iraq. The U.S. government has barred him from entering the country since late 1999. He says that action was taken after he praised Palestinian militants.

In the Chicago area, MAS has sponsored summer camps for teenagers. Shahzeen Karim, 19, says a camp in Bridgeview inspired her to resume covering her hair in the Islamic tradition.

"We were praying five times a day," Karim says. "It was like a proper Islamic environment. It brought me back to Islam."

At a summer camp last year in Wisconsin run by the Chicago chapter of MAS, teens received a 2-inch-thick packet of material that included a discussion of the Brotherhood's philosophy and detailed instructions on how to win converts.

Part of the Chicago chapter's Web site is devoted to teens. It includes reading materials that say Muslims have a duty to help form Islamic governments, worldwide and should be prepared to take up arms to do so.

One passage states that "until the nations of the world have functionally Islamic governments, every individual who is careless or lazy in working for Islam is sinful." Another one says that Western secularism and materialism are evil and that Muslims should "pursue this evil force to its own lands" and "invade its Western heartland."

In suburban Rosemont, Ill., several thousand people attended MAS' annual conference in 2002 at the village's convention center. One speaker said, "We may all feel emotionally attached to the goal of an Islamic state" in America, but it would have to wait because of the modest Muslim population. "We mustn't cross hurdles we can't jump yet."

Federal authorities say they are scrutinizing the Brotherhood but acknowledge that they have been slow to understand the group.

In 2002, customs agents stopped Elkadi at Washington Dulles International Airport and questioned him for four hours. They wanted to know who was in the Brotherhood, where it gets its money and how the Elkadis invested their money. A month later, agents came to Elkadi's home with similar questions. He recalls that he answered every one.

Elkadi remains highly regarded in some Muslim circles. An article in 2000 in the MAS magazine praised him as a great Muslim in the ranks of al-Banna and Qutb.

He and his wife say they hope the Brotherhood succeeds. After all, they say, everyone in the Brotherhood agrees on the main issue.

"Everyone's goal is the same—to educate everyone about Islam and to follow the teachings of Islam with the hope of establishing an Islamic state," Imam Elkadi says. "Who knows whether it will happen or not, but we still have to strive for it."

on the Internet

For more stories and photos in the series "Struggle for the soul of Islam," go to chicagotribune.com/news/specials

Tribune foreign correspondent Evan Osnos, staff reporter Stephen Franklin and Hossam el-Hamalaawy contributed to this report from Cairo.
A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

The current war raging between Israel and Palestinian militants isn't the only conflict under way in the Gaza Strip as Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon plans to withdraw his troops next year. Another battle is under way there too, pitting a withering moderate Arab movement against militants, especially those from Hamas, the rising radical Islamic organization with an arsenal that includes the ballot box, the Koran and suicide bombers. Conditions in Gaza are awful. In the seventh installment of this series, the Tribune shows how the Gaza Strip has become a breeding ground for terror, particularly among the young. Some observers fear that an eventual Israeli withdrawal could make Gaza a Palestinian state ruled by militants, an ominous turn in the struggle for the soul of Islam.

Poverty, hate turn a Palestinian youth into ready recruit as suicide bomber

By Storer H. Rowley
Chicago Tribune

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — No one in Ismail Maasawabi's family knew his secret.

The son of an aluminum and glass-shop worker, Maasawabi loved his family, had a lively sense of humor and studied hard in college to become an art teacher.

But Maasawabi also held a dire ambition. He wanted to be something that passes as a hero in this part of the world: a suicide bomber.

And on June 22, 2001, he got his wish. Leaving home that day during final exams, Maasawabi climbed into a jeep wired with explosives. Instead of going to class, he headed for a nearby Jewish settlement, where at age 22 he became a human bomb with all of its tragic consequences.

"He went out that day like any young man," said his father, Basheer, who was stunned to learn of his son's ambition and even more shocked when he heard of his fate. "I was out when I heard the loudspeakers of the mosque announcing, 'We give you good news. The virgins of paradise are happily receiving the new groom, the martyr Ismail Maasawabi.'"

"That a young man full of promise would willingly take his life to kill others is not, unfortunately, all that rare in this blood-soaked patch of sand and citrus groves along the Mediterranean."

Hardly a week passes without news of a similar death elsewhere in the Middle East. And the "martyrs" seem to get younger by the day. One recent survey said that more than one in four children in Gaza want to be "martyrs."

But Maasawabi differs from many of the others in one respect. His case provides a rare glimpse into the psychology of the suicide bomber, a twisted blend of religious piety and victimization that has become the new face of Muslim extremism, a force behind attacks on America and its allies around the world.

The details of Maasawabi's story are not easy to come by.
Rawda Masawabi holds a poster of her son, Ismail, who died June 22, 2001, when he detonated explosives in a jeep, killing two Israeli soldiers.
Exposed to militancy at early age

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Even asking his neighbors how and why a young man makes the transition from a devout Muslim to a radical Islamic suicide bomber can bring accusations that the inquisitor must have ties to the Central Intelligence Agency, or worse.

He lived in a world of poverty, despair and ignorance where myths are spun from the yarn of rumor, forming a cloak of conspiracy and distortion that blankets the Arab world and makes truth as elusive as peace.

Maasawabi embraced Islam firmly just as the religion became hopelessly entwined with the Palestinian resistance and Hamas, the militant Islamic organization that has grown into the most popular political group in the Gaza Strip. Hamas garner support through its social services, a hard line against Israeli soldiers who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"I lost the most precious thing on this Earth," said Maasawabi's father, Basheer, interviewed in his humble, second-floor apartment here.

He recalled how he thought his son was off to his exams on that fateful day in 2001.

"I had great hope that he would finish his studies, get a job and help me through life," the 47-year-old father recalled, adding that he had wished Ismail well on his final exams as he left the family home for the last time.

"His answer was, 'Father, Inshallah [God willing], you will be happy. You will see a bigger certificate that will make you proud and the whole family proud.' "

The Arabic word his son used for "certificate" also connotes martyrdom.

Young Ismail

Ismail Maasawabi was born Jan. 8, 1979, to Basheer and Rawda, in the Shejaiyah section of Gaza City, a district that years later would become a stronghold for the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas.

Skinny as a child, with light brown hair and honey-colored eyes, he was the third of the couple's nine children, four boys and five girls. He grew up in a devoutly religious household. As a boy, Ismail had a peaceful outlook and a kind demeanor.

He adored animals, especially his sister's cat, Mishmish. He would sit for hours in the shade of the olive trees beside his family's humble house—drawing, looking at trees and watching insects and birds. He especially loved watering the garden and savored the smell of water in the sand.

Maasawabi was a good student, and from his earliest days his teachers, imams and friends on the streets of Gaza impressed upon him the proud cultural heritage of the Muslim.

At prayers and in the pages of time-honored books, Maasawabi discovered that his faith, Islam, once dominated much of the world, extending from Asia to Spain. Muslim scholars followed Islamic troops, spreading their advanced and refined skills in the arts and sciences.
Palestinians wait for aid in Gaza City. Radical Islamic clerics win converts by combining charity with rhetoric that exhorts Palestinians to resist Israeli occupation.
Islamic scholars, he would learn, not only enhanced the knowledge base of the ancient Greeks and Persians, they also incorporated the use and production of writing paper from China and reigned supreme in an era in which they viewed Europeans as non-believing barbarians.

As young Maasawabi trudged to school each day, though, he saw on every street corner of Gaza City a far different world, one that was a distant echo of Islamic glory. Gaza and all of its troubles were the new reality.

A barren slice of land and Mediterranean coastline about 24 miles long, Gaza sits between Egypt and biblical Palestine. The Gaza Strip was part of British mandatory Palestine and was occupied by Egyptian troops in the 1948 Middle East war, when Israel declared its in-
dependence. Israel captured it in the 1967 Six-Day War. In 1994, Israel partially ceded control of the Gaza Strip to Palestinians, yet even today the area remains under the ironclad control of the Israeli army.

Just over twice the size of Washington, D.C., the Gaza Strip is home to more than 1.5 million Palestinians, plus some 8,000 Israeli settlers who have moved there and claimed land that both they and the Palestinians say is their birthright.

As a community, Gaza is like few places on Earth. It is desperately poor, with a dearth of natural resources. About 923,000 of Gaza’s Arabs are registered refugees, including many displaced by Israel’s 1948 War of Independence. More than half live in eight United Nations-administered refugee “camps,” a euphemism for slums, some of the most squalid and densely populated areas in the world.

Studies by the UN and local and international government agencies read like an economic indictment: unemployment — more than 50 percent; poverty — 75 percent; malnutrition levels — comparable to Zimbabwe and the Congo; anxiety — a third of children under 15 wet their beds at night and suffer from depression.

Decades of war and tension between Israel and the Palestinians plus factional infighting have made the current scene in Gaza grim, but the situation Maasawabi faced as a youngster was already desperate.

He grew up among the cinder-block houses that line unpaved, trash-strewn streets and narrow, rutted dirt alleyways. Refuse and raw sewage covered areas where he and other children played.

He lived in a world where a donkey cart can share a crowded traffic lane with a Mercedes, and scarce resources forced his people into a reliance on Israel and the UN for jobs, food and housing.

Worst of all and invisible to the naked eye: An aura of shame, defeat and betrayal loomed over Gaza like a brooding cloud, a haze of spite created by years of Palestinian infighting and Israeli military incursions, border closings, house demolitions and crackdowns on militants.

“In the Arab mentality, we feel ashamed of ourselves because we are defeated,” said Dr. Eyad Serraj, a psychiatrist and chairman of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program.

Serraj abhors the fact that young men like Maasawabi are lost to suicide bombing, but he understands why it happens. “In the Arab way,” he says, “it is better to die in dignity than live in defeat.”

The “martyr’s will” Maasawabi’s family received from Hamas representatives after his death shows how the shame of exile and the mental conditions experienced by many Muslims had a huge impact on him.

“I swear that the heart is crying for what happened to this nation,” he said in the document. “We are very sad that this nation today is humiliated after it was honored, is weakened after it was the most powerful and became ignorant after it was full of knowledge and science... and came to be as tall as the human caravan after it had been leading the caravan.”

One would never have sensed his anger, though, as he marched to classes in his formative years. On the surface, Maasawabi’s bleak surroundings didn’t seem to dim his enthusiasm for life as a teenager or for the activities that swirled around the mosque, a major social center for him and his peers.

He enjoyed the things that attract most boys. He loved soccer, became a good swimmer, lifted weights. His father recalled with pride how Ismail did odd jobs to earn money, including selling lemon ice cream, saving enough to buy a motor scooter and a very small boat.

Maasawabi had always been religious, his father said. As a youngster, he prayed five times a day, did charity work at the mosque and cared for the poor. Later, he kept a tape of the Koran in his pocket to play for others.

His father recalled a sculpture of glass and metal that Ismail built when he was about 15. It took him a week, and he was so proud he wanted to sell it. But his sister accidentally destroyed it. Ismail turned red with anger, but he didn’t scream or cry. Holding his feelings inside, his father said, Ismail merely remarked, “On God, the compensation”—meaning he expected that Allah would do something better for him in the future.

But it is hard for a child to remain a child in Gaza, a magnetic field of militancy that started to enter his consciousness at an early age.

Uprising

Maasawabi was 8 when the first barrage of stones hit Israeli troops in a spontaneous revolt that would be known as the intifada. It was triggered on Dec. 8, 1987, when several Palestinians were killed or injured as an Israeli truck crashed into two cars carrying Gaza workers, most of them from the Jabaliya refugee camp.

News traveled quickly to Jabaliya, and Palestinians there took to the streets in anger, marking the formal start of the uprising. There were even rumors that the crash was deliberate, revenge for the stabbing death of an Israeli in Gaza the day before.

Seething after 20 years of Israeli occupation and subjugation, youths rose up, throwing stones and molotov cocktails at the Israeli soldiers in Gaza and the West Bank, catching everyone by surprise in an insurrection that would last until the signing of the Oslo peace accords in September 1993.

Maasawabi’s father had long supported the Muslim Brotherhood, the world’s most influential Islamic fundamentalist group, which promotes the worldwide spread of Islam and the creation of Islamic states ruled by Islamic law.

“The Brotherhood had won the devotion of many Arabs by eagerly embracing the Arab cause at the heart of decades of Middle East strife—the fight against Israeli independence in 1948 and the desire of Palestinians for a state of their own on land they believe has been taken from them by Israeli occupiers. When the first intifada erupted, members of the Brotherhood helped
found Hamas, a political movement with a religious ideology, to play a leading role in the uprising.

As the intifada spread, young Maasawabi took to the streets like many Palestinian youths, throwing rocks at Israeli soldiers. His father remembers one day when Ismail, about 10 at the time, was in a crowd of children. He was behaving peacefully, but some of the other children in the group were hurling stones at an Israeli patrol. He was arrested by the soldiers and didn’t try to escape. He told his father later that it was better to be arrested standing his ground than running away. He didn’t want to run, he said, "because I wasn’t scared."

The day-to-day street fighting created a potent image that dominated headlines and newscasts across the Middle East—kids with rocks and Molotov cocktails fighting an Israeli military armed with rifles, tanks and jets, some supplied by the United States.

Israeli policies have contributed to the bleakness in Gaza. For decades, Israeli governments have seized Palestinian lands, where they built Jewish settlements. They have jailed and assassinated Palestinian leaders and militants, bulldozed entire neighborhoods, killed innocents and strangled the Gaza economy with frequent border closings—actions that often came in response to violence but wreaked havoc—and hardship on those denied access to their livelihoods.

Some 3,000 Palestinians and about 1,000 Israelis have been killed since the latest intifada erupted Sept. 28, 2000, when right-wing Israeli leader Ariel Sharon visited a holy site in Jerusalem sacred to Muslims and Jews. Arabs said they were insulted by his visit to Al Aqsa Mosque compound, known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as Noble Sanctuary (Haram ash-Sharif).

Besides the carnage in the current wave of fighting, border closings have cost some 75,000 Palestinians jobs in Israel, according to U.S. government officials monitoring the situation, a loss that affects 750,000 in the region. Total income lost since September 2000 is $2.4 billion, or more than half the annual gross domestic product of the Palestinian territories at the start of the intifada.

But even Palestinian radicals agree that more than Israel is to blame for these conditions. Also culpable are inept, corrupt, secular Arab governments with weak leaders who created the vacuum that radical organizations such as Hamas have eagerly filled.

Before his death, Abdel Aziz Rantisi, a Hamas leader in Gaza, pointed to the inability of secular regimes in the Arab world to improve conditions for their citizens as a reason that Islamic groups need to take control.

"The secular regimes, not just in Palestine but all over the Arab world, have proven their
failure economically, politically, culturally, administratively, socially and militarily," said Rantisi, interviewed in 2003. He became the top Hamas leader in Gaza earlier this year and was assassinated weeks later by the Israeli government.

Despite Rantisi's radicalism, few could argue with his assessment of the Arab world—22 governments and 280 million people ranging from oil-rich Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to Yemen and the Palestinian territories.

Annual per capita economic growth from 1980 to 2000 in the 22 averaged just 0.5 percent, the lowest outside sub-Saharan Africa, according to a UN Arab development report in 2002. Even though many of them rest on a sea of oil, the report said the value of the combined mismanaged economies of the 22 lands in 1999 didn't even equal that of Spain. Dead last in all of the rankings: the Palestinian territories, including the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Things might have improved since the late 1990s, but not by much.

Some aid does flow into the territories. But much of it goes to Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority, which Palestinians increasingly view as corrupt and mismanaged—a big factor in the current round of unrest threatening Arafat's hold on power. Palestinians say they see little of that money or help trickling down to the people.

Struggle for liberation

You don't have to wander far from Massawabi's home to see why many Palestinians view Hamas and the radical Islamists as a better alternative.

On the eve of last year's Eid al-Fitr, the Muslim holiday marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the needy file into the spacious office of Sheikh Hassan Ahmad in a drab Gaza City building to claim their holiday stipends.

One by one, Palestinian widows and orphans step up to the bearded sheik, who, after a brief check of his lists, reaches into a white envelope and produces bunches of bills to distribute. The sums range from 100 Israeli shekels, about $22, to more than 2,000 shekels, about $440—a fortune in a place where the poorest live on an estimated $1.32 a day.

"When the Palestinian Authority receives money, we don't even smell it," says Jamal Yasini, a 30-year-old Gazan who came to get aid from the sheik's Islamic Society. "But the societies put it all in our pocket. They always give us everything they get, immediately."

Not far away, the Islamic Center, another community benevolence association, supports some 3,000 people, including families of prisoners and people killed and wounded in the current conflict. "We offer the services of the clinic, social services, food ... assistance and instruments for the poor who are disabled and money for the unem-
Children in Gaza City play on graves at a cemetery where the family has lived for 30 years. Decades of war and tension have made the current scene in Gaza grim.
ployed," says Mutasem Dalloul, 23, a spokesman for the center. Founded by the Muslim Brotherhood in 1973, the center is on a shabby street in Gaza about 7 miles from Maasawabi’s home. It offers its services free of charge or for a nominal fee.

But the message of charity is not the only one found there. A sign posted outside the Islamic Center has offered this hateful ideology: “Killing the Jews is a prayer that makes us closer to Allah.”

Gaza’s radical Islamic clerics combine their social largess with a potent brand of anti-Israeli rhetoric that glorifies violence and presents youths such as Maasawabi with something they value as much as food and water—a sense of resistance, a feeling that they are fighting back.

Brian Barber, a developmental social psychologist at the University of Tennessee who has researched Gaza for a book on youth activists in the intifada, explained the Palestinian outlook.

“The people are exhausted psychologically and physically because of their failure to achieve ... basic economic opportunity, human rights and the dignity of self,” he said. “The people finally stopped trusting those who led them to believe it would improve—Arafat and the secular leaders.”

Dim prospects for peace enhance Hamas’ ability to sustain violence and lure Maasawabi and other young Palestinians to its ranks.

On June 22, 2001, near the Jewish settlement of Dugit, a medic picks up the bloody vest of one of the Israeli soldiers who died when Ismail Maasawabi blew himself up in a jeep.
The near collapse of a moderate Palestinian movement seeking a peaceful solution to the conflict and modernization of their society means there is no force countering the radicals.

"The most dangerous thing I see is when you politicize religion," said Mahdi Abdul Hadi, head of the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs in Jerusalem.

"How do we moderate develop a movement, 'Not In My Name'? These angry people can hijack Islam and use my Palestinian struggle," he said.

"Gaza is governed by Islamists, and that's why Sharon ... [sends troops] to Gaza to chop off the heads of these people," Abdul Hadi said, referring to Israeli military crackdowns on Islamic groups.

Of the suicide attacks, he said: "This killing is creating a new culture in our society. The Israelis call it a culture of revenge, of suicide or homicide bombers. We call it a culture of sacrifice, or martyrdom. It is, in fact, a little of both."

Islam does not naturally move toward this type of fundamentalism, anger and thirst for revenge. Those things have to be deliberately taught, and Gaza had become the perfect classroom.

From fiery sermons in overflowing mosques to the radical rhetoric of militant leaders in Islamic schools, youth groups, clinics and charities, the message has been to marry the personal struggle (jihad) of all Muslims to serve God with a political agenda to liberate Palestine.

No one really knows the true strength of the militants behind the bombings. But it's glaringly apparent that the radicals have an impact in Gaza that goes far beyond their numbers. When a "martyr" dies, militants transform the funeral into a social rally. Posters of the bomber's face adorn the streets. The bomber's name is blared from loudspeakers of mosques, the family elevated to celebrity status.

Support for bombings

Even those with hopes for peace often rally to support the bombers and their missions. In a June poll, more than 6 of 10 Palestinians surveyed by the Jerusalem Media & Communication Center supported suicide bombing operations against Israeli civilians, though in an earlier poll many felt that a cease-fire with Israel was in their personal interest.

Those findings are not incompatible. Support for Hamas usually grows during periods of heightened tension with Israel. Palestinians traditionally lean toward the secular nationalist movement led by Arafat and the PLO, but recent polls indicate Hamas has edged ahead of Arafat's Fatah faction in the Gaza Strip, and Hamas is aiming for a leadership role in any government formed after Sharon's planned Israeli withdrawal from the strip next year.

Hamas adopted suicide bombing as a political weapon about a decade ago, calling its Bombers shuhada, or martyrs. The Iranian-backed Shiite Hezbollah is said to have pioneered the tactic in Lebanon during the 1980s, most memorably against U.S. and other targets in Beirut.

Hamas has claimed responsibility for more than half of about 135 suicide attacks against Israel since the latest intifada started in September 2000 that have killed at least 447 Israelis, according to the Israel Defense Forces.

The Koran is filled with passages promising paradise to those who die in the service of Allah. In the hands of Hamas, those verses have helped build a pool of would-be suicide bombers who dwell more on the paradise they expect in the next life than the hell they endure in this one.

But Rashid Khalidi, a professor of Arab studies at Columbia University, said most mainstream Islamic scholars are adamant that there is no religious underpinning for suicide bombing.

"Suicide by any orthodox interpretation of Islam is completely unacceptable," he said.

"I know of nobody who would argue otherwise. The sheiks who then justify it, I don't know how they do that.

"It is an un-Islamic act to commit suicide. It's also unacceptable to kill civilians. There is a phrase in the Koran, something like, 'He who has harmed an innocent person, it is as if he has harmed the whole world.' That's not a vague precept, that's the word of God, and anyone who would argue that would have to say the Koran is wrong."

Even so, Barber, the psychologist, says support among young adults for militancy and suicide has as much to do with empowerment of the individual as hopelessness or religiosity.

"That's the tragedy," Barber said. "The only way you can feel empowered is to die. That's the ultimate expression of despair."

Nowhere is the allure of the extremists stronger than among young people like Massawabi. No longer are "martyrs" defined merely by the profile of the recent past—the unemploy-
ON THE INTERNET

For more photos and stories in the series ‘Struggle for the soul of Islam,’ go to chicagotribune.com/news/specials

ed, ill-educated, poor, young, single men seeking their reward of beautiful black-eyed virgins in paradise and the favor of Allah. Also joining the ranks are Maasawabi and others like him—educated, often well-off young men and women with otherwise promising futures.

By the time Sharon paid his visit to Al Aqsa Mosque compound, Maasawabi had graduated from a local high school north of the Shati refugee camp and had enrolled in Al Aqsa University.

Founded as a secular university with a modern campus, the university in Gaza City’s center had a program where Maasawabi could pursue his art studies. On a campus lined with trees, walkways and benches, and in nearby cafes, young men and women met and mingled. But Maasawabi never had a girlfriend, his father said.

“He had nothing to do with his life but to study and read the Koran,” Basheer Maasawabi recalled. “He had to be the best because God wants Muslims to be the best.”

Maasawabi’s religious devotion seemed to intensify after he entered the university, his father said. He started praying more than the five times a day that Islam requires, fasted for long periods, handed out tapes of lectures on Islam and made notebooks advising others how to be good Muslims.

He started painting pictures of Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, participated in the prayer circle at the nearby Abdullah Ibn Omar Mosque and started teaching younger men lessons.

“He was very glued to the mosque,” his father said, “but I never knew that he was with Hamas. He used to support all the Islamic factions.”

From Maasawabi’s last letters emerges the portrait of a young man who could no longer derive value, comfort or meaning in everyday life, who believed he could serve God only by taking up weapons and jihad against his enemies.

By most accounts, no one really had to recruit Maasawabi for his mission. One friend said he longed to be a “martyr,” and his letters suggest he was more than willing to join the ranks of the shuhada.

“It was my duty to carry my weapon and join the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades [the military wing of Hamas] to make the Jews taste the sorrow, the pain and the destruction—exactly like they are forcing our people to taste death every day,” Maasawabi wrote just before his death.

Warning issued on Arafat

The sun rose at 5:34 on June 22, 2001. Off in Israel, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres was welcoming U.S. envoy William Burns to the region, warning him that Arafat had not arrested any of the militant leaders planning attacks on Israel.

Indeed, that very morning, a roadside bomb had been detonated near an Israeli army unit patrolling a stretch of road close to the settlement of Netzarim in the central Gaza Strip. No one was wounded, but the blast could be heard for miles.

To the north in Gaza City, Maasawabi rose early as always to attend morning prayers. It was his favorite time of day. He returned home and put on a new galabiye, or robe, for Friday midday prayers.

Afterward, back home again, he showered and put on new clothes—jeans and a nice blue checked shirt—before going out in the afternoon. His father thought he was heading out to meet friends.

Before his mission, Maasawabi wrote some of his last thoughts to his family in elegant Arabic script.

“My family, my beloved generous friends, my kindhearted mother, my kind father, my brothers and sisters, I am writing these words as I prepare to leave on a trip of no return. I am not coming back to this cheap life, which is not worth, according to Allah, even the wing of a fly. This life is only a shadow that will soon disappear.

“Martyrdom for the sake of Allah is not a strange or a new thing,” he said in writings later delivered by Hamas to his family. “But it is the wish I had since my childhood, and I’ve been waiting for it with all my being. ... How many times have I prayed to Allah to give it to me? I won’t be lazy in sacrificing parts of my body, my blood and my soul to Allah.”

Maasawabi went to his death
believing he would see his family again. “My beloved family,” he wrote, “I do know that being away from you is hard, but you should know there will be a great reunion between us and a great meeting that God will gather us to in very comfortable seats in paradise.”

He addressed each family member and implored that they take pride in his action.

“...Mother, all you have to do is be patient and be happy. Ululate instead of crying. Get on your knees and thank God for what he offered you when he chose your son as a martyr... My father, my great good-hearted and unlimited-hearted father, please forgive me... I want you to be happy now seeing your son is getting martyrdom, the greatest diploma.”

He asked his brothers to take care of his mother and father and to avoid sinful acts. “Mohammed, Ahmed, Naser, you are the men of the future,” he wrote. “Be good to your mother, help my father in his work... Be glued to the mosque... Stay away from bad people. And don’t sin. Read the Koran and fast as much as you can.

“Nisreen, Assma’s, Khadeeja, Asia, Reem,” he wrote to his sisters, “I found nothing but happiness, good things, serenity and shiny smiles on your faces. ... My dear sisters, leaving this life, we will meet by the will of Allah. We will live forever under the throne of Allah. Be patient and thank Allah and live by his destiny.”

Shortly before 5 p.m. in the northern Gaza Strip, along Shikma beach near the Jewish settlement of Dugit, Israeli soldiers spotted a jeep with yellow Israeli license plates stuck in the sand. The driver was wearing a kippa, the yarmulke many religious Jews and settlers wear in Israel. A few Palestinians stood outside a house nearby. They and a Palestinian woman on the rooftop of another building beckoned for the soldiers’ assistance, indicating the jeep was stuck, according to Israeli authorities.

As two of the soldiers came near, Ismail Maasswabi, the man in the kippa, cried out and pushed a button, detonating an explosive charge in the jeep, obliterating the vehicle and killing himself. Palestinians nearby opened fire on the soldiers before fleeing, along with the Palestinian woman, who apparently was part of the mission, according to the Israel Defense Forces.

Deadlier attack envisioned

Maasswabi likely was aiming for a much larger and more deadly attack on civilians deep inside Dugit, but Israeli authorities say he was prevented from passing through a roadblock. He and his comrades on the mission apparently came up with an alternative plan that involved the soldiers.

“My soul chose to be but a candle for the nation of Islam, but at the same time sharp nails of fire against the enemies of Allah,” Maasswabi wrote in his martyr’s will, “because leaving Muslims on Earth massacred, and to stand wringing our hands from a distance, just doing this will not make us take one single step to stop the unfairness, will not help our people.”

Hamas buried Maasswabi’s remains with full honors. Islamic radicals blared his name from speakers in the mosque. Hamas released a video that showed Maasswabi holding a Kalashnikov rifle standing in front of green Hamas flags. “I am one among hundreds of martyrs in waiting who are waiting to meet God, and who are able to reach the Zionists wherever there they are,” he said on the video.

Maasswabi killed Israelis on that day at Dugit, two of them from Israel’s Givati Brigade—Sgt. Aviv Issak of Kiryat Shmona, and Sgt. Ofir Litzman of Jerusalem. Both had families that love them, both felt committed to their cause.

Fifteen minutes before the bombing, Kit had phoned his parents, telling his father that he was not afraid to die for his country, if necessary. Then he told his family he had to hang up because his friend, Aviv, needed assistance. He joined his fellow soldier to help a jeep stuck in the sand. It would be the last thing the soldiers ever did. They were both 19 years old.

Maasswabi’s father described a second video, this one taken by the Hamas team accompanying Maasswabi on the mission. Portions of it were broadcast on television. He said it shows the incident unfold and includes his son’s last words.

“I rely on God,” he is heard crying out before the explosion, the father said.

In the warrens and alleyways of Gaza City, Maasswabi’s suicide operation drew the requisite share of praise and honor. Even today his mother and father view his end as a sacrifice or act of jihad.

In the larger world, though, where suicide bombings are a tragic but increasingly common ploy, Maasswabi’s death seemed like a primal scream in an echo chamber. The wire services carried only brief stories on the incident.

Tribune foreign correspondent Joel Greenberg and Muhammad al Wahaed contributed to this report.
State comes 1st, mosque 2nd in Turkey’s system

By Colin McMahon and Catherine Collins
Chicago Tribune

ANKARA, Turkey—Like the modern office building where he works, Mehmet Bekaroglu is without flourish. His dress is Western conservative, his manner approachable, his message conciliatory.

Islam is a peaceful religion, Bekaroglu says. And it is his job to see that it stays that way in Turkey.

“We are like a strainer for tea,” said Bekaroglu, a senior official at Turkey’s sprawling Religious Affairs Directorate, known as Diyanet. “We strain the information so that when it reaches the people, it is the best possible interpretation based on the Koran. ... Our mission is to get people to live in peace and harmony.”

“Peace” is invoked like a commandment at Diyanet, which supervises Turkey’s 70,000 mosques and other state religious properties. Officials prepare the sermons for Friday prayers in pursuit of unity and understanding. Every mufti and imam who helps Turks interpret Islam is on the Diyanet payroll.

The Diyanet system is less a separation of mosque and state than a subjugation of mosque by state. And the goal is not to fuel Islam among Turkey’s 70 million people. The goal is to temper it.

The outcome of this uniquely Turkish approach has implications far beyond the borders of the geopolitically strategic na-
A Turkish man prays on the back of an abandoned truck in southeast Turkey. Despite a constitution that dictates its secular nature, Turkey maintains a strong Muslim identity.
TURKEY:
Some want greater freedom to worship

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

eonomically, it has expanded ties to the West. Yet despite a constitution that dictates its secular nature, Turkey maintains a strong Muslim identity.

This mix lends Istanbul its charm and energy. Turkey's largest and greatest city, though not its capital, Istanbul is a rush of narrow lanes fit for carts and wide boulevards choked with cars; of wood-frame homes that have stood for centuries and modern towers that mock Turkey's deadly earthquakes; of ancient brick and tempered steel.

Now as the European Union considers whether and how to invite Turkey in, many see a tremendous chance to exploit Turkey beyond its cliched status as a bridge between East and West and turn it into an example for new alliances between mostly Christian and mostly Muslim societies.

A European embrace of the nation that succeeded the Ottoman Empire, the most powerful and longest-reigning Islamic empire the world has known, would grant great credibility to Turkey's approach. And it would repudiate Muslims who argue that the West is fundamentally opposed to Islam and that Turkey has betrayed its Islamic identity in a futile pursuit of Western riches and respect.

If the November 2003 bombings of Jewish and British targets in Istanbul, and about a dozen smaller bombings since, were intended to knock Turkey off its path toward the European Union, they have so far failed. Instead the attacks confirmed for many Turks in the military and some in civilian life that tight control of religion is a matter of national security.

In shaping how Muslims worship, and how they don't, the Turkish state reaches into several critical areas of public life. It manipulates the education system to dissuade the pious from attending religious schools and prohibits them from expressing their piety in public schools. It imposes the first and the final say over what is preached at mosques and who does the preaching. And it intervenes in the political system should a religious party or leader be deemed a threat to Turkey's secular nature.

At the center of this system of control is Diyanet, a 75,000-member Sunni-dominated bureaucracy surpassed in size and budget only by the education system and the armed forces.

At Diyanet, we are not working to make people more religious. It is not our project to convert [people] to Islam.'

—Ali Bardakoglu, a theologian and academic who heads Diyanet

Most Diyanet officials are not practicing clerics but bureaucrats. They dress in the jackets and ties that many pious Muslims shun. They rise through the ranks by cultivating contacts and passing exams. They proudly display photos of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey and the national icon, but also the man whose wariness of Islam led to the creation of Diyanet.

The Diyanet headquarters of glass and steel gleams off a new highway on the edge of Ankara, the former backwater that Ata-
turk remade into a capital city as he turned the Turkish state away from Istanbul, away from its mosques of tile and stone, away from its history as the seat of the Islamic caliphate.

Though 280 miles southeast of Istanbul, Ankara feels more Western than Istanbul. The new section, with its universities, apartment buildings, hotels, theaters and embassies, now dwarfs ancient Ankara. And though urban growth has squeezed its parks and strangled its wide boulevards, parts of Ankara still have the feel of the European model used to build the city in the 20th Century.

At the same time, Ankara is clearly the seat of state power. The military establishment is here, as are the courts and parliament. Ataturk rests here, in a mausoleum built in 1953 that stands as an impressive monument not only to him but also to modern Turkish architecture. And it is from here that Diyanet runs the state enterprise that is Islam.

"At Diyanet, we are not working to make people more religious," said Ali Bardakoglu, a theologian and academic who heads Diyanet. "It is not our project to convert [people] to Islam. ... Religious services are to promote peace, not conflict."

The army likes it this way. So do many secular Turks who point to Iran and Saudi Arabia as justification in silencing even a whisper of Islamic fundamentalism. They say Turkey's secular creed has afforded the country political, economic and religious pluralism unmatched in the Muslim world.

But restrictions that some Turks find undemocratic, such as barring head scarves in government offices and university classrooms, are at the heart of efforts to protect Turkey's secular system. Devout Turks, whose numbers are growing, challenge Diyanet control. All they ask, they say, is the kind of freedom of worship enshrined in the U.S. Bill of Rights and available to their Muslim brethren in the United States.

Bardakoglu acknowledges the criticism. But he says it is too soon to talk of abolishing Diyanet.

"Turkey has paved a common way for modern, social and political life together with individual religiosity," the Diyanet leader said. "We should prevent religion from being used for political purposes. We should pave the way for individual religiosity instead."

Diyanet:
Then and now

The Diyanet system has its roots in Ottoman history. Turks point out that a split in duties between state and mosque began to take shape in the early 1800s, a century before Ataturk made his mark as a young military officer.

But the theocratic trappings of the Ottoman Empire are undeniable. Though often not especially devout, Ottoman sultans were also the Islamic caliphs, empowered not merely with political and military might but also with spiritual authority. Islam was synonymous with Ottoman and with Turkish governance into World War I, even as the Young Turks were wresting power from the sultan in the empire's dying years.

It took Ataturk to formally sever Islam's political role soon after proclaiming the Republic of Turkey in 1923. Ataturk abolished the Islamic caliphate, depriving Muslims across the world of a figure many viewed as "God's shadow on Earth." He secularized the educational system and closed the religious colleges. And in the 1924 constitution that codified his secular revolution, Ataturk established Diyanet.

As a full-service employer, Diyanet pays not only salaries but also housing and other benefits for its imams and muftis. Those who live on mosque property don't pay rent. They get health coverage and pensions, just as other civil servants. The state pays for all of it.

Along with this, Diyanet lays down standards for its clerics. Anything that hints at religious extremism violates those standards.

"Unfortunately, we do not have religious freedom in this country. The government interferes in so many ways with our freedom to worship as we like,"
said Imam Abdullah Sezer of Fatih Mosque, in one of the most conservative neighborhoods of Istanbul. "In a secular state, which is what Turkey is supposed to be, that is not right. We want the same religious freedoms they have in the United States."

Turkey's most conservative Muslims, an estimated 5 percent of the population, want to turn Turkey into an Islamic republic. Larger minorities support a legal system based on their version of Shariah, a code of conduct inspired by various sources including the Koran, the sayings and conduct of the Prophet Muhammad and rulings by Islamic scholars. On the issue of women's rights, the Diyanet line is far more liberal than what many imams would prefer to preach.

Letting such views have a full hearing, backed by the authority of clerics, would foster discord and fuel radicalism, Diyanet supporters say.

Kemal Dervis, a parliamentarian and former vice president of the World Bank, acknowledged the contradiction of having a secular state run a religion. But he said Diyanet remained necessary as a regulator, especially when conservative forces from other countries spend money in Turkey to spread their views.

"It is a little like the state should not intervene in the banking system, but it has to regulate it," Dervis said.

A message of peace, down to the letter

Diyanet's extensive reach can be seen in its elaborate process to shape and deliver Friday sermons to mosques across the country.

A lower commission at Diyanet does much of the early work on draft sermons submitted by imams or theologians across the country. Then the higher commission, made up of 16 clerics, theologians or academics plus a former army general, all appointed to 7-year terms, meets weekly to work the sermons over.

By the time the sermons are posted on the Internet and read at Friday prayers, they conform to the commission's view of Islam—and thus to the religious interpretation of Diyanet and the Turkish state.

Topics are selected up to a year in advance, with themes such as "Love of Mothers" and "How to Educate Our Children" and "Laziness." The sermons are shaped, edited, inspected and approved a few months in advance. Sometimes, though, a sermon is written and delivered immediately to respond to events.

That was the case in April, when Jewish leaders expressed concern to the government about the Turkish release of the Mel Gibson movie "The Passion of the Christ." An age limit of 16 was applied to the film, and a sermon titled "Christ in the Koran" was whipped up.

Jesus Christ, worshipers were told, was a servant of God but not the Son of God. And he was put on Earth not to redeem men but "to remind them of the rules of the Torah."

Mehmet Bekaroglu, who as chairman of the religious services department oversees the sermon commissions, said state officials outside Diyanet do not dictate the sermons, though they sometimes inquire about a certain topic.

Bekaroglu's career helps show how similar Diyanet is to other civil services and government bureaucracies.

Born in 1954, Bekaroglu started studying the Koran not in elementary school but at home with his parents. He went to a religious high school, then joined Diyanet and worked as an imam outside Istanbul. He attended the Institute of High Islam, scored well on tests and became a mufti.

By the mid-1980s, Bekaroglu was looking to move into management. He took another exam and became a deputy inspector. Then, quickly, he scored well on the next test and was promoted to inspector, one of 56 that Diyanet employs in districts across Turkey.

The inspectorate system is a key aspect of Diyanet. Each department within the bureaucracy is inspected every two years to ensure that its personnel are complying with Turkish law and with Diyanet's vision of Islam. Mosques are inspected every three years.

Inspectors and their deputies field individual complaints as well. When imams push the limits, Ankara takes note. And if the local or regional muftis fail to deal with the issue, Ankara will dispatch an inspector to restore order.

"Inspectors look to see if the
(Above) Turkish women march on parliament last month to protest a proposal to criminalize adultery. The proposal angered liberals and women's groups, and alarmed European Union officials. (At left) Nezir Ak (center) sells secondhand clothes at a bazaar in a poor region of southern Turkey last year. Many in the West hope to see Turkey become a member of the European Union, believing that membership will bring prosperity to the country and give credibility to Turkey's secular approach while maintaining its strong Muslim identity.
Two Turkish women take a rest on a bench outside an Ankara mosque. In Turkey, head scarves are the most visible and potent symbol of the conflict between the devout and the state.
system is breaking down,” said Bekaroglu, who became chief inspector in 2002 and served about a year before moving up to his current post. “The goal is to enforce peace, to get people to live in harmony.”

Flare-ups are rare, officials said, not surprising given that an imam’s whole livelihood, not merely his post, depends on Diyanet.

“As long as the sermon doesn’t provoke terrorism or promote violence, there are no serious punishments,” said Mufti Mustafa Cagrici of Istanbul. “If there are complaints, we will issue a warning. There could even be a disciplinary action. He could be suspended for a time.”

A case earlier this year in the eastern village of Kozandura, in one of Turkey’s most conservative regions, showed how Diyanet polices its clerics.

Villagers complained that the local imam was haranguing them as being un-Islamic. Women who wore head scarves and long skirts were told to switch to the black chador, a head-to-toe garment. Men were taken to task for playing cards.

Regional Diyanet officials stepped in, removed the imam from his post and began an investigation. They blamed his behavior on health problems but made it clear that he would not be back on the job unless the council investigated the charges of heart.

Turkish Islam is considered more pluralistic and more tolerant than most forms of Arab Islam, having been influenced by shamanism in Central Asia; by Sufism, an Islamic mysticism that emphasizes self-awareness and intimate and personal religious experiences; by the Alevi Muslim minority, which has a more liberal interpretation of Islam and makes up a fifth to a quarter of Turkey’s population, and by non-Muslim minorities.

“Diversity in religion and political culture created a milieu where various religious groups lived in peace and practiced their faith,” said Nilufar Narli, a professor at Kadir Has University, tracing Turkey’s openness to the West and to pluralism back to Ottoman times. “Respecting the other’s faith and his or her human dignity and freedom were the virtues shared by all the religious groups.”

Non-Muslim minorities, mostly Jews, and Greek and Armenian Christians, have faced discrimination and even persecution, both under the modern republic and during the Ottoman Empire. But today, they say they are better off in many ways than Muslim Turks because the state interferes far less in the religious lives of non-Muslims than in the lives of pious Muslims.

“The state has become so suspicious of all pious people,” said Hrant Dink, an ethnic Armenian and a Christian by birth who edits the Armenian newspaper Agos. “[Islam] here is oppressed by secularism.”

Education for all—who play by the rules

On a summer morning in a courtyard outside Istanbul University, young devout women gathered to pay a personal price for the state policy of religious control.

The women knew that their wearing of head scarves was barred from public universities. Yet they showed up anyway to take the annual entrance exam, joining thousands of male and female students who had gathered before dawn.

A university proctor emerged to address the students.

“Boys to the left,” the proctor commanded. “Girls to the right.”

Immediately dozens of young women stepped aside to remove head scarves and floor-length coats. One ducked behind a building, then returned with tears of shame streaming down her face.

She handed a scarf to another woman and ascended the stairs, eyes down before the male proctor. “I feel sorry for these girls,” he said.

Watching her sister go, Saziye Kirbas said: “I don’t know if God will forgive this sin of uncovering her head, but she needs to go to school, and this is the only way to do it.”

Though surveys show that most of the country opposes the head scarf ban, many Turks have decided that it is better to go along.

“I never got an education, and today I am completely dependent on my husband,” said Havva Altuntas, who brought her daughter, also covered, to the university exam. “I don’t want my daughter to be dependent on any man. Covered, uncovered, what does it matter? Only an education matters.”

But no matter how much an education matters, some Turks want the right to put faith first.

Covered head to heel in cloth and coat on the day of her high school graduation, Tugba Unlu ignored the hot summer sun as she spun out a sermon about Islam and democracy.

“They want us to give up our head scarves,” Unlu said, clutching a certificate of academic achievement and a copy of the Koran the school had awarded her. “But instead of compromising our religious beliefs we would rather compromise our education.”

Unlu was honored as a top student at her religious school in Sincan, an Ankara township of nearly 300,000 people. For all her talk of becoming a doctor, she knew this day might end up the highlight of her academic career.

“I don’t understand why they are trying to change us,” Unlu said. “Maybe they think the devout among us pose a threat of Islamic terrorism and that we want to change the democratic system. This is proof there is not democracy, there is no equality in this country.”

Head scarves are the most visible and potent symbol of the conflict between the devout and the state. But they are not the only way the state uses the education system to control Islam. To get into the overcrowded university system, graduates of religious schools must score better on their entrance exams than students from public schools.

The state asserts that because religious schools are better academically, public school applicants must be given a leg up. Parents who send their children to religious schools, many because they see those schools as more disciplined and morally upright, assert that the policy is pure discrimination.

“Every woman should be able to live the life she wants,” said Ismail Dogan, a retired textile worker in Kayseri, a conservative city of about 500,000. “They should respect the devout, and
the devout should respect them. We are not against the secularists. But we also want them to respect us.

Dogan, older sons and his daughter, all graduated from religious high schools and went on to private universities that required great financial sacrifice, he said. But the youngest son will go to a public high school in hopes of a better shot at a public university. It wasn't fair, Dogan said, but for now it is the Turkish system.

"We don't want to cause problems in the country. We don't want to go to the protests," Dogan said. "It is better to keep quiet, not to cause divisions."

**Politics in public, at home with Islam**

For Turks who fear any hint of Allah in politics, the controversy last month over a proposal to criminalize adultery affirmed their searing distrust of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his ruling Justice and Development Party, known by its Turkish acronym, AKP or AK Party.

Suggested as part of a sweeping revision of Turkey's penal code, the measure to restore potential prison sentences for adulterers had the strong support of AK Party's conservative base. But it angered liberals and women's groups. It alarmed European Union officials, already concerned about Turkey's limits on religious freedom.

And it provided AK Party critics with fresh ammunition: Never mind that AKP had won praise for its 22 months of governance, opponents said, Erdogan was finally revealing his "secret agenda."

AK Party eventually dropped the adultery provision and pushed through the rest of the legal package. To Erdogan's supporters, the decision provided evidence of how far he had come as a politician.

"AK Party is not an Islamic party. It's a center-right party," said Celal Hasnalcaci, a factory owner in Kayseri, which proved to be an AKP stronghold in the party's stunning victory in national elections in November 2002. "The people of the party may be Islamic, but the party is not. The vote for AK Party was a vote against the old order."

Though Kayseri may have voted against the old political order, its people revere the old ways. As they have done for centuries in this city which dates to the 4th millennium BC, residents make room in their homes for workshops where they make carpets coveted around the world. Families are close, and the mosque is a center of many people's lives.

Hasnalcaci belongs to an Islamic chamber of commerce known as MUSIAD, which AKP opponents portray as a kind of Muslim cabal funding an Islamic revolution.

MUSIAD members reject that characterization and say they merely want what capitalists the world over want: lower taxes, private ownership rather than state control and transparency in the government bidding process. AK Party, they say, is the most capable of breaking the cycle of corruption that has long been a part of the Turkish government's relationship with big business.

Looking out over the floor of his factory, located in a Kayseri industrial park in a valley beneath the extinct Mt. Erciyes volcano, Hasnalcaci watched a few dozen men and women, some in head scarves and some not, assemble his Keep Out brand of clothing.

Keep Out jeans fit tight and ride low. The sleeveless shirts ride high. It's all designed for the bare-midriff look that competes with pious dress on the vibrant Istiklal Avenue in central Istanbul.

If a fundamentalist regime came to power in Turkey, Has-
ON THE INTERNET
For more stories and photos in the series “Struggle for the soul of Islam,” go to chicagotribune.com/news/specials

...might not lose his factory, but he would certainly have to redesign Keep Out’s casual line. And an adult daughter of his who goes uncovered would have to change her ways too.

“‘Yes, yes, the hidden agenda,’ Hasnalaci said, a bit exasperated by the whole question of Turkey’s turning fundamentalist.

“Well, it’s not possible.”

Power upfront
and behind the scenes

With his party dominating parliament by a two-thirds majority and his approval ratings high and his international image glossy, Erdogan is the most powerful person in Turkish politics. But there are limits to Erdogan’s power, some dictated by the rule of law and some by Turkey’s own complex rules of the game.

In Turkey the government and the state are not always synonymous. The state bureaucracy can prove hard to control for even the most adept party in power. And Turkey’s so-called deep state, made up of ruling elites from the military, judicial branch, business and media, has long wielded tremendous power behind the scenes.

The deep state’s various players are seen as unofficial protectors of Turkey’s secular system. The army, meanwhile, is empowered by the constitution to be its official protector.

Erdogan knows firsthand the dangers of being holed up in a government building. He has spent four months in prison in 1999 for reciting a poem that included such lines as, “The mosques are our barracks.”

Erdogan now leaves his party with heaps of practicality. “In the office I’m a democrat,” says the politician who once pursued a professional soccer career. “At home I’m a Muslim.”

Many Turks fear this commitment to individual liberty is all talk. Some women in particular fear that Turkey, even if it does not become Islamic by law, will become so conservatively religious that space will shrink for liberal women to work where they want, see whom they care to and dress as they wish.

“Trying to do my job has never been so difficult,” said theater director Almula Merter, who has battled censors to put on various productions, including most recently “The Vagina Monologues” and a play about incest called “Taboo.” Merter has lived in Istanbul and New York City for the past 10 years, and she has seen Turkey move backward on liberal values and women’s rights in that time.

“I sometimes wonder: Am I doing the wrong thing by staying here and performing?” Merter said.

Notwithstanding its history of coups—three military overthrows, plus the orchestrated fall of Welfare’s coalition government—the army has kept to the sidelines. Even when Erdogan pushed for a resolution of the Cyprus conflict that drew Turkey back from the hard line many generals supported, the military went along.

Today the military remains Turkey’s most respected institution. But that public trust would be severely jeopardized were the army to override democracy again, analysts say.

“Any Turkish army reaction that is not formulated correctly is seen as a reaction against Islam,” said Umit Ozdag of the Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies, an Ankara think tank with good sources among the army’s senior officers. “An army move on AKP strengthens AKP.”

An army move on AKP would also almost certainly doom Turkey’s hopes of joining the European Union. But then, so would a sharp swing toward conservatism by the party’s devout leaders.

In December, the EU is to decide whether to begin negotiations that would lead to Turkey’s membership. Should the vote go Turkey’s way, the invitation would signal a profound break from the suspicion and hostility that have marked the Christian West’s attitude toward the Turkish people for nearly a millennium.

A no vote, however, no matter what the justification, would fuel resentment.

“If Turkey and Europe do not become full partners, that creates more fertile ground for extremism,” said political analyst and commentator Cengiz Candar. “Turkey is bigger than Turkey now.”
Schooled in jihad

By Noreen S. Ahmed-Ullah and Kim Barker
Tribune staff reporters

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — President Pervez Musharraf had the ear of the world for his groundbreaking speech. In the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks, he needed to show that the only nuclear-armed Islamic nation was not a threat.

Wearing a dark jacket instead of his army uniform, he denounced religious extremism and vowed to fix the Islamic schools in his back yard accused of fostering hatred, the ones that churned out MBAs.

But three years later, Pakistan remains a country where promises come easier than progress. Indeed, travels through the dense cities and dusty provinces of this Muslim nation that relies heavily on U.S. aid show just how little has been done to reform education—both in the Islamic madrassas and the failed public schools.

In the struggle for the soul of Islam, few things are as important as educational reform. Terrorists can be defeated in Iraq and Afghanistan, but if nothing is done to end the inculcation of hatred and the teaching of hard-line Islam in classrooms, militants will have a never-ending supply of new recruits. Nowhere is this more evident than in Pakistan, whose schools were described as “incubators for violent extremism” by the Sept. 11 commission.

That little has changed is clear inside the Darul Uloom Haqqania madrassa, where Maulana Samiul Haq still preaches the same anti-American rhetoric and praises Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. “He is a brave and courageous man,” says Samiul, the madrassa leader who scoffs at the idea of government reform.

PLEASE SEE PAKISTAN, PAGE 20
Almost 400 boys and young men attend Darul Uloom Haqqania northwest of Peshawar, perhaps Pakistan's best-known madrassa, or Islamic school.
Musharraf seen as U.S. lackey

The Haqqania madrassa, seen from a bridge, is sprawled over 7 acres. It has vast dormitories with arches, as well as administration buildings and a graveyard.
A rare glimpse inside a madrassa

Almost 3,000 boys and young men attend Darul Uloom Haqqania; perhaps Pakistan's best-known madrassa, often referred to in media reports as the University of Jihad. Its most famous student was Mullah Mohammed Omar, the one-eyed cleric who led the Taliban, the puritanical regime that once ruled neighboring Afghanistan.

On a rare visit inside Haqqania, boys can be seen picked in a courtyard for most of the day, rocking back and forth, memorizing the Koran and staring at a white wall. They are not allowed to talk to or look at each other. They do not understand the Arabic language they memorize, the teachers say.

Centuries-old textbooks are still in use, and the school's leader, Samiul Haq, speaks with pride of Mullah Omar and his followers.

"I was pleased they became the rulers of Afghanistan," Samiul says. "They restored law and order there. They respected human rights. They respected women's rights. They completely eliminated heroin and drug use."

Sprawled over 7 acres next to Samiul's home northwest of Islamabad, Haqqania features vast dormitories with arches, administration buildings, and a graveyard. For a limited tour, two women and a few reporters were allowed to wear black robes and scarves that covered everything but their eyes.

Samiul denies that Haqqania and other madrasas have been a source of jihad and militancy, but ample evidence suggests otherwise.

Only months before the Sept. 11 attacks, a conference at Samiul's madrasa brought some of Pakistan's most notorious militants to the pulpit. In the courtyard, masked men in camouflage marched and carried Kalashnikovs, as seen in a documentary called "Pakistan and India Under the Nuclear Shadow."

When the U.S. attacked Afghanistan in October 2001, Samiul and fellow clerics raised money to help the Taliban. One madrasa nestled in a working-class neighborhood gave almost $2,500 in donations—no small sacrifice for poor Pakistanis to the Taliban's embassy in Islamabad, receipts show.

Students at many madrasas
At Haqqania, centuries-old textbooks are still in use. The madrassa's most famous student was Mullah Mohammed Omar, the cleric who led the Taliban regime in neighboring Afghanistan.
have told reporters they went to Afghanistan to fight U.S. troops. Samiul denies that any students left Haqania, but Shah Abdul Aziz Mujahid, a friend and former student of Samiul’s, says about 1,000 Haqania students took off for Afghanistan.

“They announced in the mosque, the Americans had come to Afghanistan,” says Zaheerullah, 22, who uses only one name. He lives near Samiul’s village but is not a madrassa student. “All the religious scholars, including Samiul Haq, said, ‘Go, there is a jihad.’”

Sitting in his study, Samiul toys with his glasses in his lap. He pulls his graying beard into a point and occasionally readjusts his gray-and-white turban. “We are not against reforms,” he says, “We are trying our best to reform ourselves.”

He says he has added a computer room and English classes to his school, dismissing government officials who advocate madrassa reform as stooges of the U.S. Madrassas will change on their own terms, he says, not those imposed by the government.

Many madrassa leaders agree, arguing they have already incorporated other subjects into their curricula. Muhammad Hanif Jalandhury, the secretary general of a group representing about 8,000 madrassas, says his coalition developed a syllabus and published its own textbooks in math, English and Pakistan studies 15 years ago.

But buried in these books are matter-of-fact references to fighting and war. On page 85 of the English book, the focus switches from geography to Islam. Stories feature violent lessons against idol worship—a pointed reference against Hindus in neighboring India. In grammar lessons, the book includes these examples: “You had been participating in Jihad” and “Go and fight the enemy.”

In science classes at a girls’ madrassa in Islamabad, students learn that the sun was made by God. They study English translations of the Koran. A math lesson includes a formula that says God made the world in seven days. “God created everything,” says Shameem Akhtar, vice principal of the madrassa. “So every subject relates to God.”

In contrast, just outside Islamabad, the Institute of Islamic Sciences could be a model for the kind of madrassa reform the government envisions. It teaches English and math. Students from the madrassa performed better than most students from public schools in federal board tests for 10th graders. Seven students from this Islamic school scored among the top 10 in the nation.

President Faiz-ur-Rahman Usmani says jihad is just one of 70 subjects being taught at his school. He hauls out two dog-eared volumes of the 18th Century Islamic text that forms the basis of education in most Pakistani madrassas—out of 1,100 pages, only 15 deal with jihad.

But jihad is a captivating subject. Some of Usmani’s top students resent the government’s attempts to change their syllabus. It must include jihad, they argue, so they can learn the circumstances that lead to holy war. Teachers tell them it is justified against an aggressive country. Right now, the young men say, jihad is justified both in Iraq and in Afghanistan.

Abdul Biriti, 23, who just graduated, says he will go to Afghanistan or Iraq to fight America if ordered by a religious leader. “Every religious man would go to defend our brothers,” Biriti says. “I would like to go there.”

“Why not? I am ready for it,” adds Azam Khan Tanoli, 23. “Whenever our leaders say...”

At other madrassas, the sentiment is also hostile to the West.
Islam at the center of Pakistan’s history

INDEPENDENCE AND CONFLICT

Aug. 14, 1947: Pakistan, a mostly Muslim area that had long been part of British-controlled India, becomes an independent state. West Pakistan and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) lie on either side of newly independent India and are separated by more than 1,000 miles.

1947-49: Pakistan and India fight a war over Kashmir after the northern region’s Hindu maharaja opts to join India despite the fact that much of Kashmir’s population is Muslim. Both sides eventually retreat behind a mutually agreed cease-fire line.

1956: Pakistan becomes a republic, and a constitution is approved.

1958: Martial law is declared, and Gen. Mohammad Ayub Khan eventually assumes the presidency.

1965: Pakistan and India again clash over Kashmir.

1969: Khan resigns amid widespread social unrest. The country is placed under martial law, and Gen. Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan becomes president.

CIVIL WAR AND ISLAMIZATION

1971: Cultural and political differences lead to civil war in Pakistan, with East Pakistan declaring independence and renaming itself Bangladesh. India backs Bangladesh in the conflict, and war breaks out between India and Pakistan. More than 1 million people are killed.

1973: Pakistan adopts a new constitution, with a president, prime minister and two-chamber legislature.

1977: Gen. Mohammad Zia ul-Haq overthrows Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and declares martial law. He later introduces Islamization policies, including legal punishments based on the Koran.

1979: After being convicted of ordering a political opponent’s murder, Bhutto is executed. Also, Pakistan begins supporting Muslim rebels against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

1988: Zia dies in a plane crash. For the next 11 years, Pakistan is led alternately by the Pakistan People’s Party, led by Benazir Bhutto, the former leader’s daughter, and the Pakistan Muslim League, led by Nawaz Sharif.

NEW LEADERS AND A NEW WEAPON

1989: After the Soviets withdraw from Afghanistan, Pakistan continues to support Islamic extremists in the country, including the Taliban, many of whom attended Pakistani madrassas. The Taliban regime later takes over Afghanistan.

1998: Responding to Indian nuclear tests, Pakistan conducts tests of its own, confirming that it has nuclear weapons.

1999: Gen. Pervez Musharraf leads a coup that overthrows the Sharif government.

2001: Musharraf declares himself president and dissolves parliament. After the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., he allows American forces to use Pakistani military bases and airspace to help overthrow the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Sources: World Book, Encyclopedia Britannica; AP and Reuters photos
A student reads at the Haqqania library. The school's leader says he has added a computer room and English classes. Samiul Haq dismisses government officials who advocate madrassa reform as stooges of the U.S. and says the schools will change on their own terms, not those imposed by the Pakistani government.
Many students do not believe that bin Laden was responsible for the Sept. 11 attacks. They routinely attend protests against U.S. aggression. They talk of superpower ruthlessness, preferring to see the world through the prism taught inside madrasas: Muslims against the West.

The students firmly believe that America is out to destroy Islam, to crush any Muslim nation. For every argument, they cite some French book or an American newspaper article they once heard about, even if they never saw it.

They claim to know for a fact that thousands of Jews stayed home from jobs at the World Trade Center on Sept. 11. They believe Musharraf to be a lackey of America. They show a lack of tolerance for any other religion.

"Islam comes in the world to dominate the world," says Syed Ali Mohiuddin, 30, who graduated from a madrasa in Rawalpindi.

In the madrasas that allow visitors, younger children can be seen memorizing the Koran, each one starting at a different place, each one talking over the next, a mumble of broken Arabic that echoes in other classrooms. The young students sit on the floor in dark rooms occasionally lit by bare fluorescent light bulbs. There is no air conditioning; often no fans, and children are sometimes drenched in sweat.

The West believes madrassa students would be better off in a public school. But a message extolling conflict and extremism is easy to find there too.

Public schools in disarray

In a nation where the line between church and state often is blurred, students at public schools face some of the same problems as those at madrassas. Jihad is on everyone's mind.

The public education system is a mess. State-funded schools are undercut by corruption and politics. Some schools are shams, existing only on paper but still eating into the limited education budget, according to a recent report by the International Crisis Group. As a result, students have suffered. The literacy rate for adults is 41.5 percent.

The state maintains iron-fisted control over every aspect of the public school system from curricula to key jobs. Critics say the lessons promote the goals of a government highly influenced by the military. Recent public school curricula instructed educators to teach that fighting India is a religious duty and that the Kashmir dispute is legitimate. India and Pakistan have been fighting over Kashmiri territory since independence.

As early as 6th grade, public school students learn about jihad and martyrdom. A recent 5th-grade Urdu textbook devoted a chapter to Pakistani soldiers killed by the Indian army. The chapter quoted religious texts emphasizing that a Muslim has no faith if he does not wish for martyrdom, and that martyrs earn a special place in heaven.

One high school principal in Karachi turned Independence Day celebrations two years ago into an assembly encouraging students to fight jihad—if the opportunity arose.

"If you look at Pakistan's educational system, it encourages you to fight in jihad. It glorifies the military," says A.H. Nayyar, who has studied the country's schools. "It imbues the student with the philosophy of martyrdom and jihad."

Like madrassa students, those who choose a public education often graduate ill-equipped for the modern job market, end up marginalized and can become easy recruits for militant groups. Messages promoting jihad or anti-Western views simply reinforce what they learned back in school.

Nayyar, who helped write a 2003 study on public schools, found that the public school texts also promote prejudice and discrimination against religious minorities and women. Islamic studies permeate nearly every subject, from social studies to language. Clerics opposed his study, and Nayyar received death threats.

Reform of the public school sector doesn't seem likely. The new head of the Education Ministry in Pakistan is a former leader of the Inter-Services Intelligence, the feared intelligence agency in Pakistan that maintains strong ties to militant clerics. He has no experience in education.

Earlier this year, the government tried changing the textbooks but again faced fierce opposition. The textbooks were changed once more—this time with an entire chapter devoted to Jihad in at least one textbook. Nayyar says the chapter is like
At Haqqania, boys take a break from studies. They also memorize the Koran in the courtyard.

Pakistan

Population: 180 million
Percent Muslim: 97% (77% Sunni, 20% Shiite)
Government type: Parliamentary democracy
Independence: 1947, from Britain
Literacy rate: 41.5%

Legal system: Based on English common law but with provisions recognizing it as a Muslim nation
Poverty rate: 35% (2001 est.)
Industries: textiles, clothing, food processing, construction materials
Agriculture: cotton, wheat, rice, sugar cane, fruits, milk, beef

Sources: CIA World Factbook, U.S. State Dept., UN Development Report, ESRI
reading a lesson on jihad from the literature of banned militant groups.

Changes face stiff resistance

Muhammad Ijaz Ul Haq strolls confidently into the conference room of a Peshawar hotel. He is impeccably dressed in Pakistani attire—a starched tunic-length shirt, baggy pants and dark vest.

As minister of religious affairs, he is one of the key people the president has tapped for madrassa reform.

Ijaz, 52, is a religious man who nonetheless smokes, which is frowned upon in conservative Islamic circles. He says he first turned down the job when Musharraf offered it last winter, fearing he would be caught between the government and the clerics.

"If officials wanted me to do something controversial or implement something the people didn't want, it would be very embarrassing for me," Ijaz says.

But eventually he relented.

As the son of Gen. Mohammad Zia ul-Haq, the former president who set Pakistan on its path to Islamic fundamentalism, Ijaz can attempt to span the political divide between the government and the madrassas.

Everywhere he goes, he hears the name of his father, who took power in a 1977 coup and ruled until he died in a 1988 plane crash, the longest reign of any Pakistani head of state.

Under Zia's rule, madrassas sprang up across the country. Madrassa leaders to this day remain grateful to Zia for his political and financial support. Muslims from around the world began using Pakistan as a base and a training ground for holy war against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

The U.S. and Saudi Arabia supported the Afghan jihad and indirectly strengthened the madrassas. The two countries infused some $3.5 billion into Zia's Pakistan, according to Milton Bearden, CIA station chief in Pakistan from 1986 to 1989. Bearden says most of that money went into buying weapons, but Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states independently poured additional money into madrassas. Saudi officials acknowledge building schools during the war but say their involvement ended there.

"Zia didn't directly give us money," recalls Maulana Muhammad Hasan Jan, who runs a madrassa in Peshawar. "But in his time, the world gave us lots of money."

Ijaz portrays himself as a realist schooled in the world of Pakistani politics and aware of the political booby trap that madrassa reform poses for Musharraf, already the target of failed assassination attempts.

Musharraf called for madrassa reform as part of a broad antiterrorist program designed to appease the U.S. government after the Sept. 11 attacks. Since then, the U.S. has provided additional aid and pledged $3 billion over five years.

The Pakistani president also began pushing legislative and constitutional measures that would solidify the military's control of the government and extend Musharraf's term until 2007. Musharraf succeeded largely because of support from the religious political parties, a bloc of which was newly elected into the Pakistani parliament.

This alliance now poses a problem: To satisfy his American patrons, Musharraf must crack down on madrassas. But if
he succeeds, he will anger the clerics, the people he needs in order to stay in power.

In Musharraf’s January 2002 speech, he said all madrassas would register in two months and adopt a government curriculum by the end of the year. He vowed to close any madrassas that promote extremism or keep weapons.

Today, most madrassas remain unregistered, and no national syllabus has been imposed. Pakistan claims it shut down some madrassas, although no official could identify which ones. The government has opened three model schools for about 300 students.

But some madrassas linked to banned militant groups still have been allowed to operate.

At a school raided in August after leaders were accused of Al Qaeda links, female students with sticks attacked police; said Faisal Saleh Hayat, the interior minister at the time. A Kalashnikov was found in the madrassa. The school remained open.

Most government officials, including Ijaz, now say that no extremism or violence is being taught in any madrassa in Pakistan. They refuse to publicly say anything negative about madrassas. They also admit they have no idea how many madrassas exist or where they are.

Ijaz’s goal is to get the clerics to accept a plan far more modest than Musharraf’s original proposals—a new curriculum that includes some secular subjects. It may not be the kind of reform the Americans want, but that’s about all Pakistan can accomplish in the current political climate.

“Everyone’s resisting,” Ijaz says. “Nobody’s on board yet.”

Critics: Reform talk is lip service

When Ijaz talks to clerics, he does not seem like a man bent on changing anything. He seems like a man who wants to be liked.

At this year’s ceremony to mark the death of his father, more than 1,000 people crowd into a hotel basement filled with posters of Zia. “Man of the truth, man of the believers!” they shout. “Zia ul-Haq! Zia ul-Haq!” Along with Ijaz, clerics get seats of honor onstage and in the front rows.

Every speech contains the language of Islamic struggle. The country’s information min-

ister tells the crowd that jihad is part of Islam. Ijaz offers a message of support to oppressed Kashmiris, Afghans and Palestinians.

“For the preservation of Islam and the ideology of Pakistan, we will sacrifice even our last drop of blood,” Ijaz booms over the microphone.

Earlier, at the hotel in Peshawar, Ijaz was more direct to some 30 clerics, all wearing peaked hats, white caps or the signature turbans of the Pathans, who hail from one of the most conservative parts of Pakistan.

“It is widely believed that the government has a nefarious agenda against madrassas,” Ijaz said. “It is sheer misunderstanding. I have met with the president and told him that I had an age-old relationship with madrassas. I never noticed any sort of terrorism.”

Many critics believe that such scenes represent the true face of the Pakistani government-officials who pay lip service to education reform and to the Americans while carrying favor with the clerics.

After a long day of reassuring clerics in Peshawar, Ijaz starts driving home to Islamabad in his Land Cruiser. Just before 10 p.m., he grabs his mobile phone. “Are you awake?” Ijaz asks. “I’m coming over just for five minutes. … Put on a good turban.”

The government minister pulls up in front of Haqania, the infamous madrassa run by Samiul Haq. Near a photo of Samiul holding the Koran in one hand and a Kalashnikov in the other, the two men hug.

Ijaz walks into Samiul’s office, leans back on the couch, puts his feet up on the coffee table and asks if he can light a cigarette. Samiul nods and grabs Ijaz’s arm.

Samiul says the religious affairs minister needs to teach people in other countries that Islam is a religion of peace.

“It’s up to him now, to get rid of the misunderstanding about Islam in the West,” Samiul says. “That’s his No. 1 job.”

ON THE INTERNET
• For more stories and photos in the series “Struggle for the soul of Islam,” go to chicagotribune.com/news/specials
Democracy, Islam share a home in Mali

A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS It's doubtful that most Americans could find Mali on a map. Racked by poverty, decades of dictatorship and civil war, the West African nation is hardly a name on everyone's lips. There are two reasons Americans should pay attention to Mali, though. It is one of the few places in the world where Islam and democracy prosper together, and it is the newest hot spot in the West's fight against a global war on terrorism and Islamic extremism. In the 10th part of an occasional series, a Tribune correspondent finds a U.S. ambassador in Mali who battles militants with wells and pumps.
ARAOUANE, Mali — Bell softly tinkling, the guide wove his way among the scattered sleepers, singing out his wake-up call into the warm stillness of a Saharan summer dawn.

"Cinq heures, Il est cinq heures," he chanted, announcing the early hour in French, the official language in this former French colony.

The 5 a.m. sun inched up above the massive, windswept dunes, casting a pale lemon light across the ragtag camp of cots and SUVs to the nearby jumble of sand-swept mud-brick houses that compose this ancient settlement in far northeastern Mali.

With temperatures rocketing into the triple digits by midmorning and neither man nor beast active between noon and dusk, rising early is key to accomplishing anything.

As the camp began to stir, a tall, slender, dark-haired woman moved quickly to pack her gear and trudge off into the dunes in search of a secluded spot for a bathroom break ahead of the morning rush.

Soon, she would embark on another sweltering day of bouncing for bone-jarring hours across trackless desert in a four-wheel-drive vehicle to reach the most distant settlements in this predominantly Muslim nation.

Vicki Huddleston is not an aid worker or one of the 90,000 intrepid tourists who brave heat, dust and discomfort to visit this desperately poor but culturally rich nation each year.

She is the U.S. ambassador to Mali, and her post in this West African nation is just as unique as the tough, charismatic, 62-year-old career diplomat, a woman who carried a Swiss Army knife in her handbag before the security restrictions after Sept. 11.

Mali is a successful, if unlikely, democracy. A nation racked by illiteracy and poverty, it also is one of the few places on Earth where Islam and

Tribune photo by José Moré

A Malian man prays at sundown at Araouane, an ancient settlement in far northeastern Mali. Islamic fundamentalists are making inroads in the country, long known for its tolerance.
U.S. Ambassador Vicki Huddleston (right) meets with Araouane chief Salah Ould Sidi Ahmed Sultan (left) and village elders as part of her outreach to northern Mali’s moderate Muslims.
MALI: U.S. hopes to stem rise of extremists

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

...democracy prosper peacefully. It has been that way since the country's first truly democratic elections in 1992. Huddleston's job is to see that it stays that way, mainly by helping moderate Muslims counter Islamic extremists who have turned Mali's far northern reaches into the front lines of the newest and least-known theater in the global war against terrorism and Islamic extremism.

Huddleston's office is in the whitewashed, air-conditioned U.S. Embassy compound in the dusty capital city of Bamako. But her most crucial work may be in these far-flung, sparsely populated settlements and villages that dot the desert expanses north of the Niger River.

Here, where unemployment rages and the government's reach is weakest, the opportunities for terrorists to take shelter and fundamentalist groups to penetrate are greatest.

From the proliferation of new, Saudi-donated cream and green-trimmed mosques in the countryside to ubiquitous political campaign posters fluttering on city walls, the opposing forces of a growing Islamic fundamentalist presence and a strengthening democracy are evident.

Far from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that angers Muslims around the world, Mali exhibits little of the rabid anti-Americanism found in many Islamic countries. It proudly carries a rich history of ethnic tolerance and Islamic scholarship that is symbolized by its most fabled city, Timbuktu.

But Mali, surrounded by seven politically volatile nations, is not invulnerable. Like its once-prosperous and now war-ravaged neighbor, Ivory Coast, Mali could see its stability evaporate in a heartbeat.

Indeed, recent activity in the northern Malian desert by the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, a militant Algerian Islamist group with links to Al Qaeda, and the arrival of foreign Islamic fundamentalist preachers seeking converts are heightening concern that extremists have targeted long-modest Mali.

To counter that threat and nurture Mali's fledgling democracy, Huddleston uses a delicate mix of public diplomacy and military assistance.

Some of the most effective weapons in her arsenal are personal contact and relatively small amounts of humanitarian aid to help provide the bare necessities of life.

Over the course of one weeklong trip to villages in the north of this arid, landlocked nation, Huddleston spent hours sitting on sand floors to discuss wells and schools with village chiefs and their councils and encouraging education among women.

In these areas rarely visited...
by ambassadors, she cheerfully accepted curious looks and even the touches delivered by dozens of people encountered on the way.

From the United States' perspective, Mali plays a key role in a region at risk, a remote, tribal and barely governed swath of Africa stretching from the Horn to the Mauritanian Atlantic coast, a potential new staging ground for religious extremism and terrorism similar to Afghanistan under the Taliban.

"If Mali goes," Huddleston says, "the rest goes."

There is hope, though, in its history.

**A history of tolerance**

An old West African proverb says, "Salt comes from the north, gold from the south and silver from the country of the white men. But the word of God and the treasures of wisdom are only to be found in Timbuktu."

Mali's most famous city also is the repository of its history, which contains clues about its ability to combine Islam and democracy, a feat that eludes so many nations in the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

Established around 1100 as an oasis by the Tuaregs, a light-skinned people from North Africa, Timbuktu remains a mysterious and isolated place. With its mud-brick buildings and sandy streets, this city of about 35,000 offers little hint of the grandeur it once enjoyed as a royal and scholarly city in a gold-rich empire. But its citizens still take pride in its diversity and tradition of tolerance.

"As far as Mali is concerned, Islam is a tolerant religion and the proof is here in Timbuktu," said the city's mayor, Aly Ould Sidi. "We have all religions. We have Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals. Between us, the Muslims, and other religions, there is no problem. Islam tells us to respect all monotheistic religions."

Mali's version of Islam is remarkably relaxed and elastic, gracefully absorbing mystical elements, ancestor veneration and the traditional animist beliefs that still thrive, if the astounding variety of snakeskins, claws, feathers, hides and dried heads of horses, boars and monkeys available in Bamako's fetish market is any indication.

Timbuktu acquired its cosmopolitanism early, both from the caravans that passed through from North Africa and from the expansive attitude of Mali's greatest king, Mansa Musa.

Musa took the throne of the Mali Empire in 1307. Not long after Islam was adopted as the country's religion, Musa filled Timbuktu with Islamic schools, libraries and universities that eventually drew scholars from throughout North Africa and the Middle East.

An even more formidable figure is Sundiata Keita, who founded Mali about 1230. According to Malian lore, Sundiata was a prince born paralyzed in both legs. Banished from the empire by a vengeful queen, he miraculously regained the use of his legs as a young man and raised an army to save his people from a brutal dictator.

Assuming leadership of his nation, Sundiata, whose name means "Lion prince," divided...
the land and power of his empire equitably among the tribes, an iconic democratic gesture well-known even by the youngest of Malians.

"Many aspects of Malian traditional society encourage norms consistent with democratic citizenship, including tolerance, trust, pluralism, the separation of powers and the accountability of the leader to the governed," according to Zeric Kay Smith, a consultant for Washington, D.C.-based Management Systems International and a longtime student of Mali. In a 2001 article in the Journal of Democracy, he wrote, "These ideas first appear in the founding epic of the nation, in which Sundiata Keita defeated a tyrant guilty of exercising illegitimate power."

A move to democracy

Eventually Mali became a French colony, gained independence in 1960 and experimented with socialism. It wasn't until after a military coup d'etat in the early 1990s that the nation stepped firmly into the democratic camp. The man who staged that coup, Amadou Toumani Toure, became Mali's second democratically elected president in 2002.

Exhilarated by news of the freedoms unleashed in Europe by the end of the Cold War and the crumbling of apartheid in South Africa, Malians in 1991 demanded more freedoms, including free speech, free association and the introduction of a multiparty system.

In March of that year, pro-democracy groups, including students, took to the streets. But Moussa Traore, a corrupt and repressive military dictator who ruled Mali for 22 years, met them with military force, killing dozens of people between March 22 and 24. Bamako's Bridge of Martyrs marks the place where many died.

The bloodshed shocked the Malian people and many in the military. Toure, a lieutenant colonel at the time, went to Koulikoro Palace and arrested Traore. The next morning, on March 26, Toure told the nation that Mali would become a democratic country and he would relinquish control as soon as elections took place.

Unlike many military officers who make postcoup pledges, Toure kept his.

"I gave my word as a Malian," Toure recalled recently, sitting on a cream damask couch in the presidential palace. "My point was that it was the total population who struggled for democracy, and no one has the right to monopolize power."

Indeed, in multiparty elections held barely a year later in April 1992, Alpha Oumar Konare, a journalist and historian, was voted in as the country's first truly democratically elected president and Toure peacefully handed over power.

Under the Malian Constitution, presidents may serve only two 5-year terms. Nonetheless, there was some suspense as to whether Konare would seek an amendment to the constitution to run for a third term in the 2002 election. When the time came, though, Konare handed power over peacefully to the newly elected president—Toure, the man who set democracy in motion in Mali a decade earlier. Konare now heads the African Union.

Today, Mali's young democracy is thriving with all of the attendant institutions, including a legal system, however still imperfect, and a free news media that includes 42 privately owned newspapers and 124 private radio stations, the most popular medium in a highly illiterate country. It also is essentially free of human-rights abuses, according to a 2003 State Depart-
ment report.

"We paid a very important price for democracy, and we are ready to fight today to keep it," said Saouli Haidara, publisher of L'Indépendant, a privately owned daily newspaper. "Here in Mali, democracy truly brought a liberating breath to the people. But the breath did not come from heaven.... March 28th was the result of a long, long struggle."

Democracy also guarantees freedom of religion, though, and new types of Islam are challenging the traditional faith. In the past three years, ultraconservative Wahhabis from Saudi Arabia have opened 16 mosques in Timbuktu, a development termed disturbing by the city's mayor, Aly Ould Sidi.

"All these people who are Wahhabi are not citizens of Timbuktu. They come from outside," he said. "Their presence here has raised a kind of conflict with the people."

Added Abdrahmane Ben Essaouti, imam of the Djingareiber Mosque, the oldest of three great 14th Century mosques: "Wahhabis come here from Saudi Arabia. They have means. They give money and build mosques and schools and buy books.

"If you don't have means, you cannot stop them," he said. "And if we don't pay attention, they will use the students against us."

Moreover, Wahhabism often clashes with Malian practice of Islam.

"According to Wahhabism, you cannot go through someone, but should go directly to God. That's why we have a problem here—we have 333 saints," said Imam Sidi Alpha Maredje of the Serekhina Mosque.

He's not the only one disturbed by the situation, however.

Working with the villagers

As dusk fell, some two dozen men of Arouane, many swathed in the turbans and the long, loose robes of desert nomads, solemnly crammed into a one-room, mud-walled house, settled onto woolen mats strewn across the sandy floor and looked expectantly at Vicki Huddleston.

Seated on the floor before them in a modest white shirt and mushroom-colored, ankle-length skirt, she smiled and respectfully thanked the village chief for receiving her.

Throughout Mali's history, every village, however small, has had a chief, who either inherits the job or is selected by the village. Accountable to the people, he and his council make important decisions for the village, listen to problems and adjudicate disputes. The institution thrives under democracy and, in many ways, helped prepare the way for it.

Huddleston introduced the members of her small embassy contingent, carefully explaining their roles. Key among them were Aboubacrine Ag Abou Salam, a Timbuktu-born staffer in charge of the embassy's self-help projects, and U.S. Air Force Capt. Kim Crawford, responsible for the Defense Department humanitarian funds that would pay for them.

Salah Ould Sidi Ahmed Su...
Young Malian men study tablets inscribed with verses from the Koran at a religious school in the Djenne Mosque.
tan, the chief of Araouane (pro-
nounced ARE-o-wan), beamed. A
thin, wiry man with cropped
silver hair, Sultan has the fine,
light skin typical of the Arabic-speak-
ing Berabich.
Like the equally fair-skinned,
Tamacheq-speaking Tuareg,
the Berabich are nomadic her-
ders and traders. Living pri-
marily north of the Niger River,
the Tuareg and the Berabich are
tiny minorities among Mali's
predominantly black ethnic
groups.
Because of their isolated loca-
tion, these peoples receive little
contact or benefits from the
hard-pressed government in
distant Bamako, some 555 miles
and a socioeconomic universe
away from the northern region-
capital of Timbuktu.
Huddleston told her hosts, "I
am very interested in aiding
the north of Mali. It is very far
and there isn't much government
involvement. After the rebellion,
we need many things. I would
like to do what I can to help."
She referred to the 1990s Tuareg
uprising that caused many to
flee the region and left places
such as Araouane in disrepair.
As part of the peace agree-
ment, the government closed
most military outposts in the
region and, although a disarma-
ment and demobilization pro-
gram is ongoing, many of the
Tuareg remain armed.
A desert wilderness
To say Araouane is "very far"
is a distinct understatement.
To get from Bamako to Timbuktu
takes about three hours in a
prop plane. The 170 miles from
Timbuktu north to Araouane
takes another eight hours in a
four-wheel-drive vehicle, main-
ly over trackless desert naviga-
ting by GPS. The same trip
takes nearly a week on a camel, which
is what most of Araouane's Be-
rabich use.
The settlement, half-buried in
sand, has a rudimentary Koran-
ic school but no electricity, run-
ning water, roads or medical fa-
cilities. It needs everything, but
most of all a source of clean wa-
ter that isn't contaminated by
the camels and goats.
Huddleston and her staff have
come to discuss a new well and
solar pump the U.S. will pro-
vide. But she takes up a more ur-
gent matter first.
"I will be very frank with
you," she began, sweeping the
room with her eyes. "We are
very worried about the Salafists
who have been seen in this zone.
We know you want to preserve
your traditional religion. We
think democracy depends very
much on a traditional Islam like
yours."
The chief said he had heard
about the Salafist Group for
Preaching or Combat, or
GSPC, an Islamist group advo-
cating overthrow of Algeria's
secular government, but never
had seen any of its members.
Nonetheless, he assured Hudd-
leston that Araouane had not
abandoned the traditional and
tolerant Malakite Islam of Mali.
"We are against those who
would try to change our religion
and culture," he said.
Another element seeking to
change Malian culture in recent
years is the fundamentalist Pa-
kistani sect Dawa al-Tabligh,
which has joined the Wahhabis
in seeking converts in Mali, par-
icularly in the northern areas.
Fundamentalists ban on
smoking, wearing protective
fetishes and praying to ances-
tral saints do not easily erase
these austere versions of Islam
to easygoing Malians.
Many Malians, including
President Toure, are skeptical
that fundamentalists or terror-
ists will sink deep roots here.
"Mali is a very old Islamic coun-
try where tolerance is part of
our tradition," Toure said.
"I'm not worried, but it's al-
ways good to take precautions," he
said, noting that Mali has ex-
pelled some visitors and denies
visas to others but declining to
identify them.
Nonetheless, Toure agreed
that in an environment like the
north, where people are poor and
opportunities are few, preach-
ers bearing hope and ex-
tremists offering pride—and of-
ten cash—have their appeal.
"Poverty is the fertile ground
of terrorism. Some get involved
to get to heaven tomorrow. Oth-
ers believe it can change the
world today," he said, but he
added that he sees no evidence of
an immediate threat to the
country.
Diplomat concerned
Huddleston sees it differently.
"Like the Malians, I tend to
agree that Mali is not going to
change into a Wahhabi state," she
said. "But it is worrisome be-
cause the more fundamental-
ism (there is), the more women
are disenfranchised and the de-
velopment of democracy is
more difficult.
"With the Dawa, we're dealing
with something even more wor-
rising because they're in the
north. The Salafists are in the
north and they are terrorists.
And there are connections be-
tween them," she said.
In fact, in the northeastern
Tuareg city of Kidal, the Dawa
has enjoyed significant success,
particularly among former Tu-
areg rebels, according to Hud-
leston. "It's a much more con-
servative place than it used to
be," she said, adding that fewer
girls are in school, fewer women
are on the street and more wom-
ens are veiled.
She noted that the Salafists,
alienated from the Algerian gov-
ernment, share a bond with the
Tuaregs and Berabich, who feel
isolated and neglected by the
government.
Last year the GSPC kid-
napped 32 European tourists,
mostly Germans, in Algeria and
brought some of them across the
desert into Mali. Germany re-
portedly paid a $6 million ran-
som for their release, vastly en-
riching the group's budget for
arms and munitions.
In March, the GSPC report-
dedly lost more than three dozen
members in a battle with troops
from Chad and Niger. GSPC
leader Ammar Saifi, also
known as Abderrezak el-Para
from his days as an Algerian
paratrooper, escaped but was
captured by Chadian rebels.
There is evidence that the
group, under new leadership
and numbering 50 to 80, is active
again in northern Mali, Hud-
dleston said.
Moreover, the GSPC has tied
into the prolific smuggling net-
works in the desert, and mem-
bers of the group have married
into northern tribes to cement
their loyalty and cooperation.
"You have this sort of witches'
brew of fundamentalist money
from outside, the proliferation
of arms and terrorists up north
who are doing some recruiting
and they are converting," Hud-
dleston said. "You have real pos-
sibilities to destabilize the
whole region."
The U.S. considers this threat
so serious that the Defense De-
partment has embarked on a
major program for training
troops in Mali and other states
in the region to patrol their bor-
ders and root out terrorists. The
program is funded by the State
Department.
"Africa happens to be, in our
view, particularly vulnerable," said
Theresa Whelan, deputy as-
sistant secretary of defense for
African affairs.
"We have noted in recent
years that there are those who
practice and adhere to the more
radical elements of the religion
are interested in Afriq as a
Once home to an empire

In the 13th and 14th Centuries, Mali was the center of West Africa's greatest empire, with Timbuktu a major center of Islamic learning. More recently the former French colony has become a case study in Islamic democracy.

A NEW NATION

Sept. 22, 1960 French Sudan becomes independent and is renamed the Republic of Mali. Modibo Keita is its first president.

1968 Keita is overthrown by the military; Moussa Traore becomes Mali's leader.

1979 Following the approval of its first constitution in 1974, Mali holds its first national elections. Traore's Mali People's Democratic Union is the only party on the ballot.

1990 The Tuaregs, a nomadic people in Mali's northern region, begin a rebellion against the government to demand more autonomy. At least 1,000 people are killed in the conflict.

1991 Growing dissatisfaction with the Traore regime boils over and dozens are killed in pro-democracy protests. Military leaders overthrow Traore.

MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY

1992 A new constitution provides for a multiparty system. Alpha Oumar Konare, a civilian from the Alliance for Democracy in Mali, is elected president. The government signs a peace treaty with the Tuaregs giving them limited autonomy, but scattered fighting continues for a few years.

1993 Traore is convicted for his government's crackdown on protesters two years earlier, and later for embezzlement.

2002 Amadou Toumani Toure (right), who helped overthrow Traore in 1991, is elected president of Mali.
place to proselytize and attempt to get more adherents," she said. "That's something we have concerns about."

Air Force Gen. Charles Wald, deputy commander of the U.S. European Command, which oversees Africa, said America must adopt a "a more strategic viewpoint about Africa."

He said that until the Sept. 11 attacks, the U.S. had been more concerned with the continent politically, culturally and as an aid recipient than as a place whose size, location and demographics could play a crucial role in the war on terrorism.

If left unmonitored, Wald said, the rugged terrain of the Sahara could become a haven for terrorist recruitment, training and resupply, much as Al Qaeda used the Tora Bora region of Afghanistan.

"The key strategic objective is that we want to work toward that," said Wald, noting that Al Qaeda has sent emissaries into the region and terrorist groups like the GSPC have sent fighters to Iraq.

The first phase of the U.S. training program, a $7.75 million effort completed at the end of September, involved about 1,200 troops from Mali, Niger, Chad and Mauritania.

The next phase, the Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Initiative, will embrace five additional countries—Algeria, Morocco, Senegal, Nigeria and Tunisia—and cost an estimated $300 million over five years.

"If we get in early and work preventatively, we can actually achieve a great deal with a very small investment on our part, and, sometimes, it's just an investment of time," Whelan said.

Feeding Malian hopes

Just where the Sahara laps at the edge of Araouane are the remnants of a dream.

A line of scraggly tamarisk trees defy the desert, the last survivors of a once-lush garden, now long gone.

Ernst Aebi, a romantic American loft renovator from New York, first came to Araouane as a traveler in 1986. He returned in 1988, determined to restore the oasis to the vitality it once enjoyed as a camel stop on the trans-Saharan caravan routes.

By 1991, using his own money, Aebi had not only built a small hotel but had cajoled a garden of beets, tomatoes, onions and other fruits and vegetables out of the sand and taught the villagers how to maintain it.

But the Tuareg rebellion came, Aebi left, the abandoned hotel crumbled and the young garden withered from neglect.

Without support and encouragement, Mali's new democracy, now successful against all odds, and its religious tolerance also could founder.

To bolster democracy and ward off appeals from extremists in the north, Huddleston said, people have to be given a sense of opportunity.

"Ideally we should be providing jobs, with the 80 percent unemployment up here," she said. "But if you can just show your commitment—a well, a school—that keeps a village going."

On top of huge investments by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Defense Department dispenses humanitarian funds, about $1 million of which has gone to Mali.

It is crucial, Huddleston said, to balance U.S. military assistance with personal contact and humanitarian aid.

"To some degree it's image, just trying to show we care, what's going on up there, that we want to help you develop, that we think there is a future for you in the type of life you and your forefathers have lived for hundreds and hundreds of years," she said.

That is where relatively small gestures play a large role, not only in improving America's image and the local quality of life but in developing democracy and discouraging extremism, Huddleston said.

In Araouane, Kim Crawford, the Air Force captain responsible for the humanitarian funds, and Aboubacrine Ag Abou Salam, the U.S. Embassy's self-help project manager, huddled over plans for the well and solar pump with the village chief.

Huddleston asked the chief to set up a village administrative committee and appoint people to maintain the new equipment.

She also suggested that a young man be sent to Timbuktu for training on pump maintenance, with the village paying him a fee for doing it.

The chief readily agreed and was rewarded with a transistor radio and a lapel pin composed of the American and Malian flags, which the ambassador decorously affixed to his pale blue robe.

Leaving the male council, Huddleston headed for a meeting in a packed courtyard with the village women's committee, many of whose members had children in tow and all of whom seemed to want to touch her.

"The well is very important to you women. With good water, children will have better health and the family will have a healthier life," she said to the women, who responded with nervous smiles.

Health a key concern

Health is a major issue for Mali's 12 million people, almost half of whom are 14 or younger. Poverty, preventable diseases and lack of medical care cut life expectancy to 45 years, with nearly a quarter of children dying before the age of 5.

In an arid, drought-prone country, a reliable source of clean water is extremely valuable. But so too is empowering women, 60 percent of whom are illiterate. In the north, Huddleston said, "women seem to be the forgotten sex."

So in every village she gently prods them toward enterprise.

"I hope you also will have a project, maybe a little garden, and you can sell the vegetables for money to buy medicine and books," she told the women of Araouane while passing out some basic first aid items.

Hours later, darkness had fallen and a dinner of goat killed, roasted and eaten under the stars in Huddleston's barebones desert camp. Laughter drifted across the dunes from the nearby camp of the Malian army troops assigned to escort her. Most of Huddleston's group had turned in.

But late into the night, by the light of a lantern, Huddleston could be seen still talking politics and problems.

"Democracy is more than elections," she said. "Real democracy is grass-roots."

ON THE INTERNET

Read previous installments of the Struggle for the soul of Islam series at chicagotribune.com/fislam.
Moderate Islam faces challenge in Indonesia

In parts of Indonesia, more women are wearing head scarves in a nod to Islamic tradition.
By Kim Barker
Tribune foreign correspondent

JAKARTA, Indonesia — In this country, people crowd into mosques for Friday prayers, but the sex clubs are busy every night. Some people push for Islamic law, yet alcohol and drugs are easy to find. The malls feature the latest fashions for Muslims—colorful head scarves and designer tunics—but also blare out Christmas tunes to the masses non-stop throughout December.

Indonesia may be the world’s most populous Muslim country, but it also is a mess of contradictions.

In many ways, Indonesia proves that Islam and democracy can work together, a combination that has failed in other parts of the Islamic world.

But a battle is being waged here over whether the country will stay on the path of moderate Islam or whether a new breed of Islamic fundamentalists will win over the countryside. The country continues to struggle with a poor economy, corruption and political instability. For many, Islam—and Islamic law—have become the answer.

“People are hoping for a savior from their crisis,” said Jamhari Makruf, executive director of the Center for the Study of Islam and Society in Jakarta.

“And what is normally the savior? Religion, of course.”

Islam in Indonesia, a string of more than 17,000 islands in Southeast Asia, has always been different than in the Middle East. Nearly 90 percent of the 231 million people in Indonesia say they are Muslim, but the largest Islamic group follows a form of Islam blended with the Hindu and Buddhist religions and tribal traditions.

Some Muslims worship the Goddess of the Southern Ocean. One Islamic community practices matriarchal rule, which goes against Islam’s patriarchal teachings. One messianic Islamic group is led by a woman claiming to have been appointed by the angel Gabriel.

For years the Indonesian government repressed most expressions of Islam. President Suharto reigned for three decades as a military dictator who viewed Islam and communism as threats to his regime. But in 1998 Suha- to fell, unleashing Islam and democracy throughout the coun-

try.

Since then the number of Islamic parties, once heavily re-

stricted, has multiplied. Islamic thought, from liberal to fundamentalist, has blossomed. The number of people making annual pilgrimages to Mecca in Saudi Arabia has skyrocketed. Fashion designers sell high-end Islamic fashion to women who once did not cover their heads.

“The head scarf is a must,” said Istana, 22, whose father opened an Islamic clothing shop in Jakarta after the fall of Su-

harto. “It protects women from doing something bad. You can’t go to the disco or the cafe. And men will pay more respect to women in a head scarf.”

But extremist Islamic groups have found new freedom in democracy as well.

Fundamentalists once exiled from the country have returned. Extremist groups have recruited new members, fought a jihad, or holy war, on one of the country’s islands, and staged three major terrorist attacks against Western targets, including one in October 2002 at two nightclubs on the island of Bali that killed 202 people, mostly foreign tourists.

Adjusting to democracy

Scholars and political experts say this is all part of a new democracy’s extreme growing pains. The country still is trying to figure out the limits of free speech, and just what groups should be allowed to operate.

“In the last four or five years, everything is very new,” said Nur chalkish Majid, a moderate Islamic scholar. “So we cannot avoid making errors. The har-
dest thing to make people understand is that this thing called democracy takes time to estab-
ish.”

Fundamentalists also have called for Shariah, or Islamic law, a set of rules dictating ev-

eything from conservative dress to strict criminal punishments.

At least seven rural areas have elected leaders who have established some mild form of Shariah over the past three years. That is seen as a way to fight the endemic corruption that has drained Indonesia’s economy. To reduce prostitu-
tion, one town has set an evening curfew for women. Other regions are contemplating criminal punishments, such as cutting off the hands of thieves.
or stoning adulterers.

"The hottest issue that's being discussed in Indonesia is the concept of Islamic Shariah," said Ulii Abshar-Abdalla, leader of the Liberal Islami Network in Jakarta. "But almost all the people promoting Shariah don't say what it is. They just say Shariah is a solution to the messy transition. The funny side of Shariah, in the hands of bureaucrats and politicians, [it] is reduced to the simple issue of dress. It's ridiculous."

Cianjur, about 60 miles southeast of the capital, Jakarta, is one of the areas that has adopted a form of Islamic law. Government workers there are asked to follow guidelines called "A Gateway Toward a Person With Perfect Character."

The workers talk about Islamic law as a utopia, a salvation from all that is wrong with Indonesia. They say they set the trend for the rest of town: Now most women in Cianjur wear head scarves and most men pray on Fridays.

"The security problems are down, the crime is down, the level of adultery has plunged to almost zero," said H. Oleh Solehudin, the head of Cianjur's budgetary division, adding that he knows about the adultery level because of discussions in staff meetings. "Life is now calming down here."

**Islamic party makes gains**

There are other signs of the increasing lure of Islam in Indonesia. In parliamentary elections in April, many Jakarta residents turned away from traditional political parties and voted for an Islamic party known for its support of Islamic law.

On college campuses, the radical group, Hizb ut-Tahrir, banned throughout most of the Islamic world, operates openly, advocating Islamic law and the return of the Muslim caliphate, led by someone who could unite the Islamic world.

Ten years ago, when Zainal Alimuslim joined the group, he was one of only a handful of members from his hometown of Sukabumi. Now more than 1,000 belong, he said.

"It's popular even with junior-high students," Alimuslim said. But despite the increasing calls for Shariah, there's little chance it will be imposed as national law. The country's official ideology and constitution protect other religions. Politicians in Jakarta have largely rejected pressure from fundamentalist groups. The Islamic political party that performed well in April did so only by playing down any Islamic agenda.

And more important, many Muslims in Indonesia do not know exactly what Islamic law means.

In a recent poll, almost 71 percent of those surveyed said the Indonesian government should require all Muslims to follow Islamic law. But only 33 percent said Indonesia should have a law requiring that a thief lose a hand—part of Islamic law.

"Indonesians don't understand Islamic law," said Faauzan Al-Anshary, the Jakarta head of the Indonesian Mujahideen Council, a post-Suharto group that pushes for Islamic law. "Islam here is just something handed down from one generation to the next."

As if to prove his point, not one of the five candidates in the country's first direct presidential election this year supported Islamic law in Indonesia. And the two candidates from Islamic political parties received the fewest votes.

Instead, voters turned to another powerful force in their country. They overwhelmingly decided to return to what they knew, picking a military man as the new president, a man who once served under the toppled military dictator Suharto.
A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Anyone wondering how the struggle for the soul of Islam could play out in America should look to Europe. Islamic traditions and beliefs are prompting Europeans to re-evaluate practices and laws as well as prized principles, such as the separation of church and state. Nowhere is this more evident than in France, now home to the largest Islamic community on the continent. For the 11th part of this occasional series, a Tribune reporter traveled to a Paris suburb to examine the future that Europe is straining to handle.

Islam shaping a new Europe

By Evan Osnos
Tribune foreign correspondent

ST-DENIS, France — Butchered piglets hang in tidy rows at the open-air market, and shoppers haggle over cheese and oysters in a scene hardly altered since the last Bourbon king was buried at the Gothic church on the corner.

But slip out of the market on a Friday and a quarter-mile up the road you will find a very different France: Hundreds of Muslims squeezed hip to hip into an unheated canvas tent, bowing in sacred silence toward Mecca, the birthplace of Islam, which few of them have ever seen.

The worshipers at this makeshift mosque on the edge of Paris are men and women, dressed in the latest fashions and traditional robes, Arab, European and African. They are moderate, conservative and fundamentalist. They are first-, second- and third-generation immigrants. They are content and they are enraged. They are the future that Europe is straining to handle.

What is happening in Europe may provide a partial preview of what lies ahead for the United States and its fast-growing Muslim population.

PLEASE SEE ISLAM, PAGE 18

MUSLIMS IN EUROPE

23.2 million
European Muslims in 2003
Up 7.6 million from 1982
1982

2003

4.5 percent
Of the continent's population in 2003
Up from 3.2 percent in 1982

Note: Population figures are estimates. Turkey is not included.
Sources: U.S. State Department; "Europe and Islam: Crescent Waving, Cultures Clashing" by Timothy Savage, The Washington Quarterly, Summer 2004
Salim Allaoui (center) and Samira Silmani celebrate after getting married at city hall in St.-Denis, France.
Staking out their place in Europe

**ISLAM**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Muslim population.

For the first time in history, Muslims are building large and growing minorities across the secular Western world—nowhere more visibly than in Western Europe, where their numbers have more than doubled in the past two decades. The impact is unfolding from Amsterdam to Paris to Madrid, as Muslims struggle—with words, votes and sometimes violence—to stake out their place in adopted societies.

Disproportionately young, poor and unemployed, they seek greater recognition and an Islam that fits their lives. Just as Egypt, Pakistan and Iran are witnessing the debate over the shape of Islam today, Europe is emerging as the battleground of tomorrow.

"The French are scared," said Taieb Abdelkader, 38, a regular at the tented mosque whose light blue eyes and ebony beard are the legacy of a French mother and Algerian father. "In 10 years, the Muslim community will be stronger and stronger, and French political culture must accept that."

By midcentury, at least one in five Europeans will be Muslim. That change is unlike other waves of immigration because it poses a more essential challenge: defining a modern Judeo-Christian-Islamic civilization. The West must decide how its laws and values will shape and be shaped by Islam.

For Europe, as well as the United States, the question is not which civilization, Western or Islamic, will prevail, but which of Islam's many strands will dominate. Will it be compatible with Western values or will it reject them?

Center stage in that debate is France, home to the largest Islamic community on the continent.

*The French are scared. In 10 years, the Muslim community will be stronger and stronger, and French political culture must accept that.*

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A new France

St.-Denis' narrow streets sweep outward from a soaring 12th Century basilica that is the final resting place for generations of French monarchs. But today their snowy stone statues stare down onto a city and nation in transformation.

The Muslim migration to Eu-
Birth of an identity

Thirteen hundred years after the Frankish King Charles Martel repelled Muslim armies from the central city of Tours, Islam is now the second religion of France; there are about 10 times as many Muslims as Jews.

From the Paris suburbs 25 years ago, Shi'ite Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini planned a revolution that ultimately overthrew the Shah of Iran and, in turn, helped inspire a global Islamic revival. The fallout is easily visible today as the children and grandchildren of Muslim immigrants in Europe increasingly embrace religion. In France and England, polls show greater commitment to daily prayers, mosque attendance and fasting during Ramadan than there was a decade ago.

Only one in five Muslims in France say they actively practice the faith, but many who once defined themselves in terms of Tunisian, Iraqi or Turkish descent now consider their primary identity to be Muslim.

"Nobody was talking about Muslims in France at the end of the 1990s. People were talking about Arabs or beurs," said French political scientist Justin Vaisse, using the term applied to French of North African immigrant descent.

Young French Muslims gravitate toward charismatic spokesmen of a new European Islam, such as controversial Swiss-born philosopher Tariq Ramadan, whose French headquarters here in St.-Denis urges a "silent revolution." In his writings, he advocates using the political process, instead of violence, to win Muslim rights and recognition across Europe.

Ramadan's supporters call him a major voice of moderate Islam, but some critics say he is tied to extremists, a charge he denies. He was scheduled to begin teaching this year at the University of Notre Dame until U.S. immigration authorities rescinded his work visa, citing unspecified national security concerns.

Unlike earlier immigrants, who were bent on returning
Near a 12th Century basilica that is the final resting place for generations of French monarchs, a young Muslim woman from Eastern Europe begs for money at an outdoor market in St.-Denis.
Islam a growing force in Europe

A rapidly growing Muslim population is changing the social dynamic of many European countries. France, home to the continent’s largest Muslim population, has banned Muslim head scarves and other religious symbols in public schools in an effort to defuse tensions.

**BY COUNTRY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent Muslim population</th>
<th>1% and less</th>
<th>2% to 5%</th>
<th>6% to 10%</th>
<th>11% or more</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Largest Muslim populations</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.5 million</td>
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<td>Albania</td>
<td>2.1 million</td>
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<td>Serbia and Montenegro</td>
<td>1.9 million</td>
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<td>2003</td>
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<td>Britain</td>
<td>1.3 million</td>
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<td>Bosnia-Herzegovina</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
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Note: Population figures are estimates. Turkey is not included as part of Europe for purposes of this map.

Sources: U.S. State Department; Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life; “Europe and Islamic Crescent Waxing, Cultures Clashing” by Timothy Savage, The Washington Quarterly, Summer 2004

Chicago Tribune/Adam Zoll, Chris Soprych

In many parts of the world, the Muslim community is growing in size and influence. This growth has led to a rise in Islamic movements and organizations, which in turn has raised concerns about the potential for radicalization and extremism. In Europe, for example, Muslim populations have been increasing, leading to debates about cultural assimilation and the role of religion in public life. One effect has been a rise in Islamic political parties, which have been viewed with suspicion by some as a threat to secular democracy.

The growth of the Muslim population has also had economic implications. In many countries, Muslims may face discrimination in the job market, which can limit their access to opportunities and contribute to economic inequality. At the same time, the Muslim population may also be a source of economic growth, particularly in countries with strong ties to the Islamic world.

In conclusion, the growth of the Muslim population in Europe is a complex issue that requires careful consideration. While there are concerns about the potential for radicalization, it is also important to recognize the positive contributions that Muslims make to society and the economy.

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home flush with cash, more-recent arrivals have been deterred by the turmoil in their homelands and stayed, building families that are larger than those of their graying ethnic European neighbors. The effect is amplified by the decline of European Christianity. The number of people who call themselves Catholic, the continent’s largest denomination, has declined by more than a third in the past 25 years.

The results are stark. Within six years, for instance, the three largest cities in the Netherlands will be majority Muslim. One-third of all German Muslims are younger than 18, nearly twice the proportion of the general population.

With that growth, and the deepening strains between the U.S. and the Islamic world, radical Muslim clerics have found no shortage of adherents. A 2002 poll of British Muslims found that 44 percent believe attacks by Al Qaeda are justified as long as “Muslims are being killed by America and its allies using American weapons.” Germany estimates that there are 31,000 Islamists in the country based on membership lists of conservative federations.

Year by year, European Islam pulls further away from the cultural traditions of Morocco or Algeria, refashioned all the while by the pressures of life in Europe. For some, the solution is a more liberalized Islam that incorporates Western concepts of individual rights and tolerance. But for others, the answer lies in a stricter interpretation of the core elements of the faith.

“It is more fundamentalist in its essence because what you sublise on is personal practice—reading of the Koran, Sharia,” Vaisse said. “It can take very humanist forms, but in some cases, it can also lead to political radicalization and terrorism.”

The potentially serious effects of that radicalization became clear on March 11, when coordinated bombings of four commuter trains in Madrid killed 191 people and wounded more than 1,800. Moroccan and Tunisian suspects later killed themselves in a standoff with police.

More recently, the Netherlands is in turmoil after the brutal killing of Theo van Gogh, who made a controversial film about violence against women in Islamic societies. Police arrested a 26-year-old man with Dutch-Moroccan citizenship and charged him with stabbing and shooting van Gogh. The sus-
pect allegedly pinned a note to the body with a knife.

Within days, an Islamic school was set ablaze, and retribution followed. Right-wing politicians in Belgium and Germany demanded new curbs on immigration. In time, however, a more ominous fact emerged from the case: It was not the work of newly arrived immigrants with extremist views, but the product of homegrown radicalism. Police say suspect Mohammed Bouyeri wrote the death note in Dutch, not Arabic.

"This [cultural] schizophrenia is the most dangerous thing we face in Europe today," said Gilles Kepel, head of Middle East studies at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris and author of several books on Islam in Europe. "It means Madrid. It means Mohamed Atta," he said, referring to one of the Sept. 11 hijackers who lived for some time in Germany.

Two men, two visions

Where moderate Muslims ultimately place their loyalty may be the defining—and unpredictable—ingredient in the struggle to fashion an Islam of the West. To understand the choices, visit the men who represent the two competing visions of Islam in France.

Dalil Boubakeur, rector of the Grand Mosque of Paris in the heart of the city, is a long-standing voice of moderate Islam in France. On the other side is Lhaj Thami Breze, president of the Union of Islamic Organizations of France, the increasingly powerful Islamist federation.

Trained as a dentist, Boubakeur, 64, runs the 1930s-era mosque in the heart Paris. He is prone to quoting Immanuel Kant and is a favorite of French officials and foreign ambassadors. He wears a red rosebud on his lapel signifying membership in the Legion of Honor. And he knows he is losing ground.

"Since Sept. 11, the world of Islam is changing faster in the West than other places in the world," he said at his antiques-lined office, his V-neck sweater, rimless glasses and wispy gray hair giving him the air of an English schoolmaster. "Western countries had had a gentleman's agreement with fundamentalists: You can stay here as long as you keep quiet. But the gentlemen are not being as quiet as they used to be."

There is no question that Boubakeur's influence is weakening. Last year he was hand-picked to be president of the official French Council of the Muslim Faith, a new body established by the government in 2003 to give Muslims a formal voice in dealings with the state. Just as other bodies represent Catholics and Jews, the council speaks for Muslims on issues such as the construction of mosques and the training of clerics.

But things didn't go as planned. In the first election, his moderate camp was trounced by conservative candidates who won 70 percent of the 41 seats. The next vote is scheduled for April, and moderates are expected to lose even more to the men he believes are "radicalizing Islam" in France.

"The facts are there: Religions that close in on themselves become sects, and that is what is happening to Islam here," Boubakeur said. "And I am very sorry about that."

Across town, beside the highway in the tough Paris suburb of La Courneuve, Boubakeur's opponents are confident. Breze greets visitors at his glass-and-steel headquarters with a glossy package of materials and a calm message of "coordination, not confrontation."

"We are not extremists," he says, sipping espresso at a conference table. "We practice our beliefs and have respect for the state. We want one thing from Europe and France: that they are faithful to their values."

Indeed, Breze and the union have thrived under Western democracy. Just two decades after its creation, by two foreign students, the union dominates French Islam. In the last elections for the Council of the Muslim Faith, Breze won control of a crucial post representing central France.

Breze's federation draws 30,000 people to its annual conference, and the crowd is increasingly vocal in challenging the political powers that be. At last year's convention, the interior minister was booted in the middle of his speech when he suggested that women must remove their head scarves for ID photos.

So what does Breze really want for Muslims in France? He and his group carefully calibrate their demands. They demonstrate against the ban on head scarves, for instance, but urge young women to respect the law as long as it is in effect. His federation is part of a broader umbrella group for all of Eu-
ISLAM
CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Europe that is known for issuing decisions that help conservative Muslims function in a modern Western society by permitting, for instance, interest-bearing loans that would otherwise be banned under Islam and allowing the consumption of pork-based gelatin.

Push Breze on the most sensitive issues—does he seek an Islamic state in France, or the application of strict Islamic law and punishment—and he says no: "Perhaps they are valid in Saudi Arabia or Palestine, but they are not valid here."

To some critics, Breze is a "double talker" who says one thing in French and another in Arabic. To others, he is simply a shrewd strategist who understands the coming power of the fast-growing Muslim communities here.

For his part, Breze says his mission is to convey a simple message: "France must respect this population."

A parallel world

By all appearances, she is as French as they come. A law student at the Sorbonne, she has dark brown hair that falls in stylish curls to her shoulders. Dining with friends in downtown Paris, 33-year-old Faten Mansour wears Diesel-brand jeans and red stiletto heels. But she will be the first to point out that she is not just French.

"I am a woman, I am an Arab and I come from the suburbs. I have three handicaps," she says. "France is not racist, but it is xenophobic. I can study the law all night, but I don't know if I will find a job—not because I'm not competent, but because I'm an Arab."

That feeling of exclusion has emerged as the central issue in the struggle to integrate Islam in Europe. Whether it is Turks in Germany, Indonesians in the Netherlands or Pakistanis in Britain, polls show Muslims feel they live in a parallel world within Europe.

There are no Muslims in the French Parliament, no Muslim CEOs of top French companies, and the national news media is overwhelmingly white. Midlevel Muslim politicians routinely recite instances of their careers being diverted by higher-ups.

In an unusually blunt official assessment, the French government's auditing agency in a report released Nov. 23 faulted the
republic for failing to combat segregation in housing, workplaces and schools. The same week, France’s largest insurer, AXA, presented a report concluding that young immigrants in France experience a rate of unemployment that is 2 to 5 times as high as that of young people who are ethnic Europeans.

Moreover, that frustration is getting worse over time. “The first generation came to Europe to work, the second generation was caught in between two cultures. But the third generation is completely French, and they want all the rights of citizenship,” said Khalid Bouchama, the St.-Denis representative for Breg’s group.

For ethnic Europeans, the Muslim migration amounts to a world upended: The continent that for centuries exported its people, culture and religion to the Third World is now being shaped by its former colonies. But for the French establishment, the challenge is to bring Muslims into European society without changing the foundations of secular democracy.

No decision has sparked more controversy than the French government’s move to ban conspicuous religious symbols from public schools, including Muslim head scarves, Jewish yarmulkes and large crosses. To its opponents, the law was a blunt refusal to accept Muslim immigration. But to its supporters, it was a decisive move to lower the barriers building between France’s young people.

“It showed you can only go so far, you can’t go any further,” said Blandine Kriegel, an advisor to President Jacques Chirac on integration issues. “The issue touched a raw nerve. It is a nerve that is at the very heart of our way of life.”

Kepel, the professor, served on the commission that recommended the law. He originally opposed the idea, he says, until he heard testimony from teachers and young women who described how young fundamentalists used girls’ decisions to wear a veil as leverage to pressure them into adopting a more religious lifestyle.

“If we were accused of being Islamaphobes, let’s take it and not give a damn. It was a time to give those kids the opportunities to interact in the best possible way and not jeopardize their futures in French society,” Kepel said.

French Muslims responded with mass protests. Terrorists in Iraq abducted two French journalists and demanded that the law be repealed or the captives would be killed. The move backfired—French Muslims roundly denounced the threat.

Four months into the first school year under the law, 45 girls across France remain out of school or in mediation over their refusal to remove their scarves. Considering that 2,000 girls were believed to be wearing the veil last year, French officials have been pleased with the outcome.

Other than the veil law, Kriegel said, the government is trying to reduce segregation of Muslim immigrants by expanding access to French language instruction and combating workplace discrimination. The government, she believes, is on the right track.

“There are no fires in the banlieues,” she said. “There are no riots as there were in the black ghettos in the United States in the 1960s. Why don’t we have that? Because we’ve been rolling up our sleeves and doing something. ... We have turned the corner.”

But in St.-Denis and other suburbs, the verdict is less clear: The huddles of young men stand like emblems of 17 percent unemployment, well above the national average. Classrooms and public housing are overcrowded with fast-growing immigrant families.

The mosques are busier than ever: the storefront Tawhid Center for young followers of Tariq Ramadan; the Tabligh mosque for the reclusive adherents of Saudi-style conservative Islam; the many basement prayer rooms for whoever stops by.

A French intelligence official who monitors fundamentalist groups said he believes the veil controversy and efforts to train imams have pushed French Muslims to an awkward reckoning point: They must decide whether to integrate with Europe or fight back in earnest against official efforts to shape their community.

“They are at a crossroads,” he said. “They can either go left or right.”

ON THE INTERNET

For more stories and photos in the series “Struggle for the soul of Islam,” go to chicagotribune.com/news/ specials/
Learning in a conservative setting

By Evan Osnos
Tribune foreign correspondent

Deep in the misty hills of Burgundy, fervent young European Muslims are forging an Islam of their own. Depending on the point of view, they are either budding fundamentalists or Europe's best defense against extremism.

The European Institute of Human Sciences lies at the end of a winding country road in a drafty 19th Century chateau in the town of St. Leger-de-Fougerey, France. The site was a corporate retreat until 1992, when a federation of French Muslim groups bought the 27-acre campus of craggy trees and moss-lined brick paths.

Every year, 150 men and women from across Europe, ranging in age from 14 to the mid-30s, pay $3,500 a year to study theology and Arabic language, and memorize the Koran. Most are second-or third-generation immigrants, and some are converts. They are the proudly conservative vanguard of European Islam.

"I used to go dancing with my friends, but my life was not close to Islam. Islam was not deep in my heart," said Lazare Boufeta, walking under a canopy of towering pine trees on the path to his small dormitory room. "One day I started thinking, where am I going? Do I have an aim in my life?"

Boufeta was like any other young French man in the southern city of Grenoble, snow-boarding and playing clarinet, until he made the change. The tall and slim 25-year-old arrived at the institute last year and began growing his beard. He adopted the brown robe and sneakers favored by other men on campus. His mission, he says, is to help his nation understand Islam.

"I am French, I know French history and theater. I feel closer to France than Algeria," he said. "But France is afraid of things it doesn't know. As we see, nuns can wear a head scarf, and the French are not afraid of them. But not Muslims?"

The school's declared mission is to train a new generation of homegrown clerics. Its backers call that a vital step in supporting Europe's burgeoning Islamic population. Government officials across the continent are cautiously welcoming the project as well because they are eager to reduce their nations' dependence on foreign imams and foreign financing of mosques, on the belief that ties with the Arab world are fomenting extremism and stymieing integration.

France has about 1,000 Muslim places of worship, and all but a handful are funded in part by foreign governments, according to the Interior Ministry. Ninety percent of the imams in France don't speak French, the ministry says. Spanish officials are also trying to reduce their 400 mosques' links to Libya, Morocco, Malaysia and Saudi Ara-
Maryam Duale (left) and Zeenat Azmi are among 150 students who traveled to rural France this year to study Islam.
In St. Leger-de-Fougeret, girls pray in the mosque at the European Institute of Human Sciences, dedicated to the study of theology and Arabic language.
The Netherlands has launched state-financed integration courses to tutor all imams in Dutch views of tolerance, such as the thorny issues of euthanasia and drug use.

State support of Islam stirs deep unease in Europe's secular societies. Former French Cabinet minister and rising political star Nicolas Sarkozy sparked controversy last month with the suggestion that the government should finance the construction of mosques.

Doing so would mean revising a century-old French law on the separation between church and state, a particularly hallowed principle in France known as laïcité. Sarkozy believes that, not unlike Turkey—where authorities directly manage the religion as a means to control it—France must no longer maintain a hands-off approach to Islam.

France has deported at least 10 clerics in the past three years for endorsing violence or for spousal abuse, including Algerian-born imam Abdelkader Boutziane, who argued that the Koran allows men to beat unfaithful wives. Britain and Italy have also expelled or jailed imams for expressing what authorities consider statements in support of violence.

By some measures, the European Institute of Human Sciences, with branches in St.-Denis, France, and near Lampeter, Wales, presents a possible solution. Still, there is much about it that makes the French government uneasy; a senior Interior Ministry official said the textbooks, training and lectures at the school are "being watched."

The wariness begins with the school's sponsor, the Union of Islamic Organizations of France, an influential federation of local Muslim groups. The union has long-standing ties—though it denies formal links—to the Muslim Brotherhood, the world's largest Islamic militant group, which has renounced violence but remains banned in Egypt.

The campus has a conservative atmosphere: Men and women do not socialize; bearded men study at one end of the room and veiled women at the other. The cafeteria is split by a screen like those found at restaurants in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Most of these young men will not become full-time imams because they could not earn enough to make a living.

Some stick with Western clothing, while others adopt the traditional Arab robes, including a few who wear the robes with higher hems that are favored by Saudi-based Wahhabi teachings. But those hints of orthodoxy should be seen as a sign of healthy Islamic practice, not a drift toward radicalism, said the school's Iraqi-born director, Zuhair Mahmood.

"The government prefers non-practicing Muslims to practicing Muslims," he said, a framed photo of Mecca resting on the timeworn marble mantelpiece beside him. "But it is the non-practicing Muslims who steal, commit crimes, cause problems. ... The young people who have only read one book about Islam and think they understand it, those are the people who misunderstand Islam."
Muslim youth forge own path in America

A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS
The future of Islam in America may well be in the hands of a new generation of Muslims who were born here. Now in college and experiencing the challenges that life in America poses to their religion, young Muslims balance spirituality with socializing, the call to prayer with the latest CD. Their Islam is not necessarily the religion of their parents. They are striving for an Islamic identity that can navigate the complexities of modern life in a secular world. Such challenges are part of daily student life for Muslims at Loyola University Chicago. A Tribune reporter spent time with them for the 12th and final installment of the series examining the struggle for the soul of Islam.

By Barbara Brotman | Tribune staff reporter

Maheen Sheikh, a 21-year-old junior, rushed into the Loyola University Muslim Students' Association mosque, tied a scarf around her head and faced Mecca to pray. Just then the secular interrupted the divine, in the form of her ringing cell phone.

"No way!" she said into the phone. "Oh, my God... Guess who I talked to?"

Islam, meet Verizon. And dorm rooms, Freud, women's studies, hip-hop dance, class and a world of fellow students for whom a date over a beer is ordinary, not heresy.

"The future of Islam in America? Part of it is here."

The children of Muslim immigrants who began coming to this country in larger numbers in the 1970s are going to college. Born in America or brought here when they were young, they are defining what it means to be a Muslim American.

The guys with their baggy jeans and cell phones downloaded with Biggie and Jay-Z, the girls with their head scarves tucked into hoodies and sometimes a cell phone stuck inside making a kind of Islamic hands-free phone, the other girls with their uncovered hair up in ponytails—they are all making a way of Mus-

COMING SUNDAY
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Islam life that is distinctly theirs. Their Islam is not necessarily their parents' Islam. Many are pursuing what they call a "pure" Islam, separate from the cultural traditions their parents brought with them.

They are negotiating the sometimes complex path between Muslim faith and American culture. Is it acceptable to watch MTV? To listen to music? At what point does makeup cross the modesty line?

How much should they avoid contact between men and women? That issue flared into an angry conflict in the fall over who would get to use the MSA's lounge.

Is America the land of opportunity, temptation or both?

PLEASE SEE ISLAM, PAGE 22
Farah Khan, 19, a sophomore from Lincolnwood, travels from Loyola University’s Lake Shore campus to its Water Tower campus. Muslim students’ lives are packed with classes, tests, family gatherings and five prayers a day.
Youth want to embrace Islam

Feizan Khan (front) and Ali Mehdi nap in the lounge area at Loyola's Muslim Students' Association. During the fall semester, the men and women in the group clashed over the use of the lounge, which was usually occupied by men.
ISLAM
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

These are part of larger questions that pit the American value of freedom of choice against the Muslim tradition of conforming to divine law and take into account all the permutations in between.

The students are at a stage of life when American culture is most at odds with Islam. They are at college, and not drinking. They are at college, and not dating.

They are living a faith whose name means "submission," in a country founded on revolt.

They are making their way with so many individual variations that you can’t really say what they as a group, are doing.

Except that it starts with Islam.

Religion over culture

Shaheen Baig, 22, president of the Loyola Muslim Students’ Association, called the first meeting to order inside the mosque, or masjid, the only one in Illinois run by students.

In a little-girl voice but with adult confidence, Shaheen, a pre-med senior majoring in biology with minors in psychology and women’s studies, ran through the coming events.

There would be the start-of-the-year picnic, inshallah. After that would be Islam Awareness Week.

“Do y’all have a big fundraiser?” asked a young woman from Houston, establishing the reach of Islam throughout the U.S. with a single word.

For some students, college has brought their first encounters with substantial numbers of other Muslims.

“I didn’t know many Muslims in high school. When I started college, it was kind of culture shock,” said Shaheen, of Park Ridge. At Maine South High School, she was the only student who wore hijab, the term for modest Muslim dress that has come to refer to the head scarf.

“I felt really special. Then I came here, and there were so many people like me.”

Loyola’s Muslim student population, which numbers about 350, is not monolithic. The MSA, which has 300 members, has a core of active students; about 75 consistently attend Friday prayer. For others, the Muslim group is not a regular part of their college life.

College MSAs tend to attract students who are more religious. There are many young Muslims following less traditional paths.

“It’s very difficult to talk about a single type,” said Shabana Mir, an Indiana University doctoral candidate in education policy who has researched Muslim students at several colleges.

“I came across people who identified very strongly as religious and at the same time might have had girlfriends and boyfriends, consumed alcohol and attended nightclubs. At the other spectrum, there were those who didn’t go near a nightclub, didn’t drink a drop of alcohol and observed very strict forms of religiosity.

“And in between, there is a whole range now being termed as moderate Muslims,” she said.

The Loyola MSA students are children of immigrants from India, Pakistan and the Middle East. They are among the estimated 6 million to 8 million Muslims in the U.S., about a third of whom are African-Americans. By the year 2020, according to one estimate, there will be more than 15 million American Muslims.

In their Muslim homelands, the students’ parents absorbed Islam in the air around them. They prayed the way everyone around them prayed without asking why.

Their children are asking why.

They are American, Shaheen pointed out: “Here, in school, kids are taught to ask questions.”

They want to pray. But they want explanations. What is the purpose of prayer? Why do Muslims begin prayer by raising their hands to their shoulders, palms up, then sweeping them down to right in front of their bellies?
Rumaisa Ansari, 23, (left) pushes aside a curtain that separates the men's prayer section. Rumaisa came to the U.S. from Pakistan five years ago.

Tribune photos by John Lee
U.S. Muslims diverse ethnically, geographically

Estimates of the number of American Muslims vary widely, but most experts say it is 6 million to 8 million. By 2020, the total is expected to surpass 13 million.

U.S. MUSLIM POPULATION
By ethnicity
- Arab: 32%
- South Asian (from Pakistan, India, etc.): 10%
- Non-immigrant Muslim (mostly African-American): 29%
- Other (from Turkey, Iran, Bosnia, etc.): 29%

By state in 2000:
- 0.4 - 0.8% (7)
- 0.3 - 0.4% (4)
- 0.2 - 0.3% (9)
- 0.1 - 0.2% (9)
- 0.0 - 0.1% (21*)

* includes Alaska and Hawaii


They respect their elders to a degree non-Muslim parents can only imagine. But many say they want to shed their parents' cultural baggage and follow what they consider pure Islam, unadulterated by ethnic traditions.

Culture is man-made and thus can have bad aspects, they say, like a denigration of women that female MSA members say is found nowhere in Islam.

Buoyed by Muslim pride and free of their parents' needs to survive in an unfamiliar country, they proclaim their Muslim identity with Muslim Garb skirts and green wristbands declaring Muslim unity.

"Our parents want to embrace American culture; they don't want to give offense," said Nuha Hasan, 21, of Justice, a senior majoring in psychology. "But now we want to embrace our religion."

Most of their parents have reacted to their piety with pride. But for Mohammed Shazaad's mother, pride is mixed with concern.

"She's afraid I'm going to start going extremist," said Mohammed, 18, an intense-eyed freshman psychology major whom everyone calls Shazaad.

At their Morton Grove home, his mother, Dr. Sameena Ziauddin, a physician at Oak Forest Hospital, said she is impressed by her son's generation's Islamic learning.

"For some reason, the children are more religious here," she said. "I think it's good. We were just blindly following.... They have more knowledge."

She just wants to be sure her son has enough time to study secular subjects. And she doesn't think young Muslims should "take it too far and become completely separate. They have to tolerate other religions."

For Hassan Ali, 19, Islamic study has led to tension between him and his father. His father prays with a group that believes there are Islamic saints. But Hassan says Islam rejects the idea of intermediaries between people and Allah, and he will not pray with that group.

"I follow the Koran strictly," said Hassan, of Romeoville, a sophomore majoring in political science. "I'm pretty harsh. He does get bugged out, but then he says, 'All right, whatever you want.' At the end of the day, we're still father and son."

Marcia Hernandez, a professor of Islamic studies at Loyola who has been the MSA's faculty adviser since 1998, is wary of young Muslims' pursuit of "pure Islam."

"It can be a little harsh, rigid, defensive," she said.

The idea of an Islam that
floats above culture is attractive because the students don't have their parents' foreign cultural identities and yet don't feel entirely accepted in America, she said.

But there is no such thing as culture-free Islam, Hermansen said; everywhere Islam took root, it was influenced by the local culture.

Embracing a strong Muslim identity is a way students can assert their dignity, she said, the way young African-Americans did in the black power movement.

It is also a form of classic American youth rebellion. "It gives them a chance to trump their parents: 'I know Islam better; you're practicing cultural Islam,' " she said.

A few years ago, Hermansen, who is Muslim, saw the pursuit of "identity Islam" ushering in a trend toward narrow-mindedness on college campuses.

"Quite a number of Muslim youth in America are becoming rigidly conservative and condemning of their peers (Muslim and non-Muslim), their parents, and all who are not within a narrow ideological band," Hermansen wrote in a 2002 paper.

But Hermansen, who is on sabbatical but in Chicago this year, thinks that trend has eased at Loyola. And she has changed too; she is now impressed with the positive aspects of students' focus on their Islamic identity.

"It's a shallow identity marker; it's a much deeper dimension for a person's humanity," she said.

Question of open-mindedness

The students have plenty of non-Muslim activities. Arwa Hammad, 20, of Alsip, is active in the MSA, but also in Habitat for Humanity, Unite for Sight, Colleges Against Cancer and the Minority Association of Pre-Health Students. When they aren't praying, the MSA members are often talking about friends, clothes and tests.

Sukaina Hussain, 19, a sophomore from Skokie, gets miffed when people expect her to be living in some kind of segregated Muslim world.

"People are surprised how Western I can be," she said. "I watch 'Friends' on TV. I watch 'The Apprentice.'"

"I watch 'Gilmore Girls.' I watch MTV," added Mehnaz Ahmed, 19, of Skokie, a sophomore who works at an Express store on weekends. "I watch TRL."

Sukaina hesitated about MTV's "Total Request Live," however, which features music videos and celebrity interviews.

"That's getting into a non-Muslim area," she said. "That's not appropriate."

She turned to Mehnaz. "I'm not saying you're bad," she said hastily.

But Farah Khan, 19, a sophomore from Lincolnwood majoring in biology thinks many members of the Loyola MSA are quick to condemn others.

"People here have a lot of judgment," she said. "The way you dress, the way you talk, what you talk about."

She wears hijab and considers herself profoundly devoted to Islam. But she finds the atmosphere at Loyola so harsh that she is thinking of transferring to another school where she might find a more open-minded Muslim group.

"One of my friends at UIC wears hijab and also has an eyebrow piercing. And she likes punk music. If she were to come in here, people would really freak out," she said.

Since leaving high school, she has met Muslims she never knew existed. Some have strayed into alcohol; others have tried drugs. "I realized that Muslims are normal. They make mistakes," she said. "I'm willing to forgive people's pasts if they're nice people. Since I started college, I guess I've become more open-minded."

She doesn't think the Loyola MSA is open-minded. Last year, Farah made a friend who was in three of her classes. They talked, which seemed only natural.

"Except the friend was male. MSA tongues started wagging. 'People were like, 'Well, I heard that this, this and this.' I would say, 'How could you get that out of just me talking to him?""

The issue of separating men and women to prevent temptation became part of a dispute this fall involving the MSA lounge.

The Loyola MSA has a men's prayer area, a women's prayer area with a small sofa and a lounge with two larger sofas, a coffee table and a work table.

Muslim men and women pray separately to minimize distractions and promote modesty. But the lounge is not a prayer area, so it fell into a gray zone. It was usually occupied by men.

One day in the fall, Farah and about 10 other female members of the Islam Awareness Week dinner decorating committee sat in the lounge to use the coffee table while painting the centerpieces.

Some of the guys asked them to move. "They said, 'You can sit here this time, but next time, don't.'" Farah said. "I just found it very rude. I said, 'You can't tell us when to sit here.'"

"I was, like, is this kindergarten? Are we going to talk about cooties?"

E-mails flew as word spread.

"This is war," one woman declared. There were skirmishes.

Women suspected men of stretching out to sleep just to keep them out. Some women sat in the lounge deliberately to anger the men.

To some of the women, called sisters in Islam, it was a line in the sand. "Some girls were like, 'If we're stopped on now, they're going to step on us more,' " said Noor Ali, 20, of Bloomingdale, a senior with wide, calm eyes who serves as the sisters' representative.

To other women, it was more important to keep men and women separate in a mosque. "In the house of Allah, there is supposed to be no intermingling," said Arwa Hammad, a junior majoring in psychology.

To the men, it was a matter of maintaining separation in a limited space, said Umar Jabbar, 21, a junior majoring in sociology who lives on the Northwest Side.

"At any time of day, there are more brothers here than sisters," he said. It wasn't fair for large numbers of men to have to retreat to the men's prayer area so a couple of women could sit in the lounge, he said.

To Noor, a psychology major, the conflict illustrated the problem with culture. "Culture always conflicts with religion," she said. "You tell the guys, 'Islam treats the sexes equally. And they say, 'Yeah, but it's always been this way.'"

The MSA board, which includes men and women, called an open meeting. They listened to a tape of a Muslim scholar speaking about modesty. At the end, the group decided that women should not sit in the lounge unless there was a special meeting or event.

The women were given a small table so they wouldn't have to do their homework on
Noor Ali (from left), Ebanah Hasanat and Lubna Chaudhry chat during an MSA picnic. Noor first tried covering her hair at 16 but found it too difficult. Two years ago, she discovered she was ready.
the floor. The men promised to speak more quietly to avoid disturbing women praying. And in response to women who said they felt the men were staring at them as they walked past the lounge, the men turned the sofas to face the other way.

Farah, who said she didn't know about the meeting, was dismayed at the whole conflict. “The issue isn’t where we sit, but respect,” she said. “Our religion says to respect each other. Everyone is being hypocritical now. I mean, inside the masjid, this is going on—how ironic is that?”

Shaheen said the board is considering a solution that may satisfy everyone—remodeling the mosque to expand the women’s prayer area and eliminate the lounge.

Fliers announcing the new rules were posted on the walls. Below the request that students respect board members, someone had written in green marker, “Respect all members.”

Muslim students pray on a Friday at Loyola's Lake Shore campus. The school's Muslim Students' Association has about 300 members, of whom some 75 students regularly attend Friday prayer.
Prayer is joy

Behind the curtain of the women’s area, freshman Tayya-
ba Ahmad, 18, of Morton Grove, who has an infectious grin and a
tendency to call people “dude,” stood.

She swept her hands up, then down. “The reason for that
movement, she has been taught, is that the worshipper is first
pushing the world away, then pulling the awareness of God di-
rectly to her center.” Then she spent five minutes in prayer, si-
lently reciting Arabic praises of God and requests for God’s guid-
ance, following a precisely choreographed performance of
bows and prostrations.

The Loyola students pray unselfconsciously, moving seem-
lessly from talk about midterms to prayer and back to the Chips
Ahoy cookies on the table.

Prayer is a five-times-daily encounter with God, Tayyaba
said, a way of staying aware of God at all times: “You’re always
thinking, I’ve got to pray soon. If you’re in class, you think, I’ve
got to make sure I wash up for prayer.”

And the body movements, she said, meld the physical and in-
ner worlds. By putting their heads lower than their hearts,
Muslims are lowering their pride and elevating their hearts to
God.

Maheen Sheikh sometimes prays in the car, which is some-
thing of a feat. “I’ll just bend down a little,” she explained.

There are Muslims who don’t pray, although it is one of the
five pillars of the religion. But for those who do, it is a powerful
habit.

“You know what’s weird? Once you start, you can’t stop,”
said Maheen, who lives off-cam-
pus. “You feel so guilty. The
nighttime prayer—if I don’t
pray and go to bed, I will have a
dreadful dream.”

Prayer is both obligation and reward. “When you pray, you
feel happy,” said Hasan Khan,
3, a brawny sophomore biology
major who lives on the North-
west Side. “There is nothing
more pleasurable than prayer.”

Prayer is Tayyaba’s greatest
joy. “Every time I come here,
when I’m standing, when I’m in
prayer, I thank God,” she said. “I
got my time with my Lord in
peace; no one bothers me. I’m so
happy.”

Even less religious students can find themselves drawn to it.
Shahena Khan, 20, a chemistry
major from the Northwest Side,
grew up with little religion. But
when she started visiting the
Loyola MSA this year, she was
captivated.

“I love Friday prayer,” she said. “It’s a meditative state. It
really works for curbing your desires, so you’re not angry and
vengeful. It’s kind of like Bud-
hism.”

Surrounded by temptation

An American college campus is home to the classic extracur-
ricular interests of young men and
women—music, dating, parties and beer.

Islam questions or prohibits
all of them.

Never will Muslims feel more different than at college, said
Loyola’s Marcia Hermanus.

“Once you’re married and set-
tled down, the differences aren’t
as extreme. Married people are
married people. … You’re prob-
ably not going out to bars
much,” she said.

Samer Oudades, 20, a sophomore
business major who has the cool
grin and fluid moves of the rap
world he loves, sees temptation all around.

Non-Muslim students invite him to go out drinking, to go
to parties, to dances. Early in the
school year, he accepted an invi-
tation to hear a band play, only
to find that young men and
women were dancing together.

Shame.

Samer, who was born in Syria
and lives in an off-campus
apartment, considers the MSA
his safeguard. “I’ve been, like,
pressured lots of times,” he said.

“That’s why I stay with all the
brothers. These are my road
dogs.”

Lena Ismail, 20, a junior and
an economics major from Or-
land Park, encountered drink-
ing for the first time in her life at
a Loyola dorm during her fres-
man year.

She had graduated from the
all-girls Al-Aqsa School in
Bridgeview. “I didn’t know what
a drunk person looked like,” she
said. “I was, like, why are they
acting like that? But after a
while, I caught on.

“My floor was wild, but they
were really nice,” she said. “It
was so fun. I miss it so much.”

The Muslim prohibition on
drinking is clear. Music, howev-
er, is another story.

There is no decisive prohibi-
tion on music, leaving Muslims
to interpret the Islamic attitude in
various ways. Saim Jabbar,
18, of the Northwest Side, a
freshman majoring in biology and
Umair’s younger brother, takes the strictest view.

“If you listen to music, it’s go-
ing to be stuck in your head
when it comes time to pray,” he
said. “You’ll be thinking about
music, not facing God.”

Hassan Ali not only listens to
music but produces hip-hop,
which some Muslims find more
acceptable, along with rap, be-
cause they often don’t use wind
or string instruments. Hassan
makes no such distinctions. He
figures that since the prophet
never forbade it, any music is
fine.

Tayyaba can see both sides. She
considers music a universal
human art but believes there is
“nothing too beneficial in it.” So
it is an art she no longer experi-
ences.

“After learning that it’s not
the greatest thing, … I don’t
listen any more to music,” she
said.

Mohammed Shazauddin is
struggling with the question.

“I’m going to be honest; I list-
en to music,” he confessed.

“Soft rock, alternative, Linkin
Park. … I really see the reason
music is prohibited, but I’m sort
of in transition as far as making
up my mind.”

As for dating, the Loyola MSA
members agree that it is forbid-
den because it can lead to pre-
marital sex.

Shaaz considers dating dan-
gerous. “I just feel if I started
doing things like that, I’ll fall into
a lot of bad things, things like al-
cohol and drugs,” he said.

The proper Islamic protocol,
students say is for a young man
to ask his parents to contact a
young woman’s parents and ar-
range an introduction.

Nuha Hasan will not consider
any other kind of courtship.
Several men have already con-
tacted her parents. She turned
down one marriage proposal be-
cause the prospective groom
wanted children right away. She
intends to get her graduate de-
gree first.

Some Muslim students do
date. And there are those who
consider it acceptable to meet
someone on campus and then in-
volve their parents.

“I will bring them to who I
choose,” Shaheena Khan said
firmly. “I’ve been as respectful
to my parents as the Koran says,
but there are some places where
I must draw the line.”

Not rebelling but exploring

Senior Rumaisa Ansari loves
Descartes. The 23-year-old busi-
ness management major from
Evanston got so excited talking
about the French philosopher
about whom she wrote a seven-
page paper, that she rocked for-
ward on her toes as if she were
about to take off running.

“He was saying, ‘Who created
me? Where did I come from?’ He
was doubting his own creation,”
she said.

The doubt fascinated her. “In
Islam, my parents taught me,
you cannot question God,” she
said. “Descartes, he was ques-
tioning.”

As a Muslim, she will not
question the Koran or God. But
that leaves pretty much everything else. "I want to see other perspectives, how other people take it," she said. "I like to debate, to argue.

"What I study philosophy, history, sociology, all the liberal arts—it makes you think. ... I'm not rebelling; I'm exploring."

Unlike most MSA members, Rumaisa was not raised in America. She came to this country with her family from Pakistan five years ago.

And since then, she said, she has changed. She leaned forward, grinning, practically dancing. "Now I'm thinking, as they say, outside of the box."

'Just you and God'

How to explain the beauty of Ramadan, the holy month of daytime fasting that arrived about the same time as midterms?

Sitting in the mosque, Noor Ali talked about people who change their lives during Ramadan. They stop listening to music. They avoid worldly things. Even if they don't usually pray, they pray.

She couldn't wait.

Noor thought about putting on hijab for years. She tried it when she was 16 and three months later took it off, to her mother's dismay Noor told her she couldn't understand why the prophet would ask women to do something so hard.

While attending Rockford College two years ago, she thought about it again. She wondered what her non-Muslim friends would think. Plus she had a wedding coming up and wanted to do something special with her long hair.

Then one day during Friday prayers, something happened. "For one second—one second—I forgot everything," Noor said. The doubts disappeared. She couldn't even remember what they had been.

She kept her veil on after prayers. She kept it on that afternoon, which she spent home alone pacing in front of a mirror. She has kept it on in public ever since.

She feels touched by God. "Before it happened, I was thinking, 'Oh, is that ever going to happen to me?' It's like when you fall in love."

Noor's friends watched as she became more religious and they were inspired. "I said, 'I want to do that,'" Arwa Hammad said. "It's almost like you feel jealous," agreed Asma Mustafa, 20, a pre-pharmacy junior from Oak Lawn.

Pious Muslims talk about how great they feel, this sense of goodness, this sense of peace and purity you can't get anywhere else," Arwa said. "It's just you and God. You say, 'I can do that. I want to feel that.'"

Some of the MSA women feel no need to cover their hair. But the question of putting on hijab weighs on others. "I think about it all the time," Lena Ismail said.

Women who cover describe hijab as both an expression and a practice of devotion. It's un-g
es them, enveloping them in a constant reminder of their Muslim identity and their relationship with God.

In a college application essay, Farah Khan explained *hijab* in terms of the movie “The Matrix.”

Just as there were two realities in the movie—a happy but fake world and a real but horrific one—Muslim women who wear *hijab* experience a different reality than those who do not.

“*Hijab* creates a world of its own, with its own rules and regulations, as well as a certain mindset that comes with wearing it,” she wrote. “Not only does having it on change how one looks and how others think of them, but it changes the way one thinks of oneself.”

One afternoon during Ramadan, Noor sat on the MSA mosque floor.

“I think I’m going through something,” she said. “I can’t sleep. Sometimes you feel like you’re nothing and you haven’t done anything good for God. If I die tonight, what am I going to say to God?”

**Perfect place for Islam**

*This is my country
And I love it to death*
*I guess that’s why you can say*
*I’m always breathin down its neck*

—Samer Obid, rap lyrics

“America may not be perfect. Women get tired of explaining why they do, or don’t, wear *hijab*. Many of the MSA members don’t agree with U.S. policy in the Middle East and the Muslim world. And the prevalence of sex in entertainment can make it hard to choose a movie.

“The only thing I don’t like about America is that they use the female body to sell things,” said Hassan Khan.

But America, say the students, is just about the perfect place for Islam.

“America is the coolest place,” Tayyaba said. “You have Muslims from all over the world. But in America, you’re Muslim. That’s what unites you.”

In America, Islam is free from the deadly battles Muslims are fighting among themselves in other countries, said Hassan Ali, who ended up free to pray differently than his father.

“Sunni versus Shia—it’s insane,” he said in disgust. “And what’s the fight over? Something that happened ... years ago.”

In America, he said, Muslims undertake serious study of the Koran’s content instead of just memorizing the words. He considers rote memorization “an insult to the Koran.”

And in America, he added, he is free to say so. “If I were in Pakistan, I wouldn’t mention that opinion,” he said.

In America, inside the Loyola MSA mosque, Tayyaba checked the time on her cell phone.

She smiled. “I have to pray now,” she said.
Struggle for the soul for Islam

Although nothing in the nature of Islamic belief itself promotes violence, a wrap-up of a Tribune series on Islam suggests that the injustice and suffering many Muslims experience give them a sympathetic understanding of the option of terrorism.

OF TWO MINDS

By James O’Shea

Jordan’s King Hussein, a moderate Arab leader often in the cross hairs of Middle Eastern terrorists, once warned American intelligence officers against using harsh terms when publicly referring to violent Islamic groups. “Be careful how you characterize them,” the king told agents assembled at CIA headquarters in Langley, Va. “You see, there is a great deal of them in people like me and there is a great deal of me in people like them.”
The exchange, related to Tribune editors by someone at the meeting, occurred years before the king’s death of cancer in 1999. But his advice remains as wise now as it was then.

The king was a moderate Muslim much like the vast majority of those who practice Islam, the world’s fastest-growing religion but also one exploited by the terrorists who have attacked America.

He did not agree with the acts of extremists such as Osama bin Laden. In fact, he often worked behind the scenes as a staunch ally of America in the war on terrorism, which existed long before Sept. 11, 2001.

But in many respects the king’s and the terrorists’ cause were one: Righting an unjust world in which millions of people who practice Islam suffer, often at the hands of governments empowered by America and its policies.

“I didn’t entirely ‘get it’ when he said those words in the early 1990s,” said a former official who was at the meeting but asked not to be identified publicly.

“But it suddenly became very clear to me on Sept. 11, 2001. I was certain that, had King Hussein been alive and had he seen those planes crash into the World Trade Center, his first reaction would have been, ‘How dare you do such an obscene thing?’ And then, I think, he also would have said, ‘But I understand why you do it.’”

A 12-part Tribune series on the struggle for the soul of Islam suggests that the king was not alone in his sentiments.

The Tribune reported the series, which ended this month, to answer some simple questions posed by readers in the wake of Sept. 11: Why are people from faraway lands attacking America and Americans? Why do they happen to be Muslims? Is there something about Islam that promotes violence?

Reporters found little to suggest that Islam encourages violence, despite the impression Westerners might have because of exposure mostly to extremists. In fact, its venerable history suggests that Islam, like most religions, promotes peace and charity.

But the Tribune series also showed how American foreign policy has angered Islamic radicals and moderates alike, from the suburbs of Chicago to the refugee camps
of Gaza, from the dusty streets of Pakistan to the winding warren of stalls in Egypt's colorful bazaars.

Those who take action against America, such as the men who flew the planes into the World Trade Center, are a relatively small band.

But this radical fringe shrewdly capitalizes on the legitimate grievances of many moderate Muslims against American government policies, enabling the militants to extend their influence far beyond their numbers.

Some academics and experts on Islam suggest that the result is a clash of civilizations that pits the Islamic nations that blend church and state against the secular West. But the Tribune's reporting suggests a better reading of the situation as described in the Sept. 11 commission's final report. The bipartisan study authorized by Congress and President Bush was the most comprehensive examination of the 2001 attacks on America.

"The United States," the report said, "finds itself caught up in a clash within a civilization. That clash arises from particular conditions in the Muslim world, conditions that spill over into expatriate Muslim communities in non-Muslim countries."

In Chicago, the clash surfaces in a suburban mosque where a local sheik uses Friday prayers to raise money for a Palestinian man ac-
cused by the U.S. government of aiding terrorists.

Moderates at the mosque don't necessarily agree with the hard-line policies of the sheik. But the moderates temper the volume and tone of their criticism because of sympathy for the cause that the accused man supports: the plight of the Palestinians.

In one way or another, the clash surfaced in Egypt, Kuwait, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, West Africa, Israel, the Gaza Strip, Spain and France, all places Tribune reporters visited as part of the series.

Some of the reporters worked in Iraq too, but the war there so clouds everything that it is hard to isolate where the fight against the American occupation ends and the struggle within Islam begins.

The nations the reporters visited were as diverse as the landscapes within their borders, from the desert moonscape north of Timbuktu in Mali to the narrow streets and ancient basilica of a cosmopolitan suburb just outside Paris.

The Muslim people who inhabit these lands reflect that diversity. They are black, white and brown; young and old; poor and rich; peaceful and angry. In other words, they are just like Americans.

Their universe is not a monolithic world of Muslim and non-Muslim. And they don't fit neatly into America's latest litmus test for friends and foes—you're either with us or against us.

Life just isn't that simple. They look at America through a political prism sharpened by historic and legitimate grievances in their homelands, where problems often are caused by corrupt, greedy leaders whose military and political muscle is made in America.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the Gaza Strip, where America's lopsided support for Israel and the corruption of the Palestinian leadership combine to create a radical Islamic juggernaut.

Muslims living in Gaza judge the violent acts hatched by militants from Hamas against the radical organization's ability to provide the health, social and political services that the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority don't deliver. To many Muslims around the world, a Palestinian child who dies be-

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cause no one cares enough to provide decent health care is just as compelling a victim as a young Israeli killed by a militant bomber.

That doesn't mean one side is right and the other is wrong. Nor does it mean the United States should stop supporting Israel; far from it. The situation is simply a reflection of the way things are, of the grim reality that is the Middle East, where America remains a major force that could help change things for the better.

Indeed, with the death of Yasser Arafat, a Palestinian leader considered corrupt and inept by many Middle East experts, America has a historic opportunity to strengthen Palestinian moderates, primarily by adopting a policy that balances more equitably the interests of the Palestinians and the Israelis.

No one is naïve enough to suggest that will be easy. But in almost every nation that Tribune reporters visited, the issues that most united radical and moderate Muslims were the war in Iraq and the plight of the Palestinians.

Using America's influence with the Israelis to play a constructive role to help settle the Palestinian conflict would be the single most effective step the U.S. could take to win the war on terrorism and to deter another attack in the U.S. It would defuse the most powerful propaganda weapon in the radicals' arsenal.

The Saudi predicament
America's policy toward Israel and the Palestinians was not the only dark spot for reporters visiting the region. The same tensions are evident in Saudi Arabia. Saudis not only maintain pipelines that deliver oil to the world, they also sustain a financial pipeline that delivers money to militant mosques, the ones that preach a brand of Islam whose adherents often promote violence, including violence against America.

Saudi-financed cream and green-trimmed mosques promoting the ultraconservative Wahhabi brand of Islam are spreading in Mali, a West African nation in a region that U.S. officials fear could be the newest and least-known front in the global war on terrorism.

Tribune reporters found anecdotal evidence of Saudi money elsewhere: in Pakistan, Egypt and Gaza, all hotbeds of Islamic extremist activities. The Sept. 11 commission report said Al Qaeda even raised money in Saudi Arabia, although Saudi officials reportedly cut off any funding once their own institutions came under attack from the organization.

Yet America remains a major supporter of the Saudi royal family, which also is a lightning rod for radicals who oppose the government. Some Middle East observers believe it is only a matter of time until the royal family is toppled. They urge Saudi Arabia and the U.S. to openly confront the problems in their policies toward each other.
... about more than oil," the Sept. 11 commission report said. "It should include a shared commitment to political and economic reform ... a shared interest in greater tolerance and cultural respect, translating into a commitment to fight the violent extremists who foment hatred."

In some countries, such as Egypt, reporters found an Islamic cultural resurgence rising from a population sick of ineffective government, corruption and recurring humiliation of Arabs by the West. In other nations, such as Iran, reporters found Islam imposed top-down by a religious government that rules its citizens with an iron fist.

In both cases, though, American policy does little to ease the problems of the average Muslim. In Egypt, U.S. policy helps perpetuate a government that is a democracy in name only. In Iran, U.S. opposition to the nation's nuclear ambitions undermines the support of a growing moderate Islamic movement, a youthful faction that rejects the more conservative practices of the nation's ruling imams.

**Anti-U.S. sentiment prevalent**

Tribune reporters found widespread hostility toward the U.S. in the streets and shops they visited in the Muslim world. Polls document that such sentiment was more than anecdotal. One 2002 Pew Global Attitudes survey found that only 6 percent of those questioned in Egypt, a leading recipient of American aid over the past 20 years, held a favorable view of the U.S. Other Muslim nations surveyed registered similar negative results.

Clearly, there is more at stake than some benign popularity contest. For decades Americans worried about the nuclear Armageddon threatened by the Cold War. The mere thought of an attack was so horrible that it served as a deterrent.

Now today's student schooled in jihad is tomorrow's suicide bomber. The damage he or she can inflict may be on a smaller scale, but it can be devastating nonetheless for Americans and their interests around the world.

In fact, Tribune reporters traveling to Pakistan found just as great a threat in the Pakistani school system as in its military, the world's only nuclear-armed Islamic army.

America pumps hundreds of millions of dollars in aid into Pakistan, but most of it goes to the military. Precious little is left for the public schools, which, by almost any measure, are a disgrace. As a result, many families send their children to madrassas, religious schools that the Sept. 11 commission referred to as "incubators for violent extremism."

Indeed, for every militant killed or captured by the U.S. or another government, Pakistan churns out dozens of potential recruits to take his or her place. A possible effective countermeasure is American aid to promote education reform in Pakistan, a nation whose importance in the fight against Islamic extremism is hard to overstate. But precious little Pakistani or American money finds its way into education reform.

Not all of the reporting was a tale of woe.

There are those who believe
ON THE INTERNET

- Find the Tribune’s complete “Struggle for the soul of Islam” series online at chicagotribune.com/islam

that Islam, which rejects the Western notion of separation of church and state, is incompatible with democracy. But democracy and Islam coexist peacefully in Mali. Malians adopted democracy in the 1990s on their own; it was not imposed by an outside power. Turkey, too, calls itself an Islamic democracy, although the government tightly controls religion and clamps down on militancy the minute it surfaces in speeches or prayers.

Islam and democracy also coexist in Indonesia, the world’s most populous Muslim nation, although a battle is underway to remain on a path of moderation.

A Tribune reporter who followed Islamic students in America also found that democracy is flexible enough to welcome Islam. A new generation of Muslim students born in America is enrolled in places such as Loyola University Chicago. They are a world where cell phones mix with hijabs, where makeup challenges Muslim notions of female modesty. They are redefining what it means to be Muslim in America, and their brand of Islam is not necessarily the religion of their parents.

Throughout the world, it is hard to judge the intent of many by the acts of a few.

In Kuwait, a rich nation by anyone’s yardstick, a young devout Muslim man driving a Lexus killed a man simply because he was an American. But most young Kuwaitis embrace conservative Islam because it paves the way to religious, political and social success in their country and culture, not because they dislike America.

Americans today, three years after Sept. 11, are struggling to understand Islam at the very time that the U.S. has embarked on a war against terrorism that some view as a war against Islam. Bush and others say that is not so.

But America has to do more than talk. Islam is growing rapidly around the world. By the middle of the century, at least 1 in 5 Europeans will be Muslim. The continent already is struggling to absorb the makeshift mosques and Arabic script on butcher shops from Amsterdam to Paris.

Europe’s future is the same one that awaits America, a nation of immigrants where Islam is growing rapidly too. The U.S. should adopt policies that make Muslims as comfortable here as Christians.

2-pronged strategy proposed

The Sept. 11 commission came up with a two-pronged strategy to deal with the challenge that faces the nation.

One phase involves the small percentage of Muslims committed to people such as bin Laden. They are impervious to persuasion, the commission says, and must be hunted down and destroyed.

It is with the far larger moderate Islamic community that the commission suggests a second prong. America should stop exporting its fears and anger, and start sending moderate Muslims a vision of opportunity and hope, a future that stresses life over death, the rule of law and a place that will give their children a better future.

"It is among the large majority of Arabs and Muslims that we must encourage reform, freedom, democracy, and opportunity," the commission report said. But it added:

"The United States can promote moderation, but cannot ensure its ascendancy. Only Muslims can do this."