

GREAT DECISIONS

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3. Sectarianism in the Middle East

Acronyms and abbreviations

ISIS—Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

GCC—Gulf Cooperation Council

UAE—United Arab Emirates

Glossary

Arab Spring: A revolutionary phenomenon in the Arab world that began with a 2010 Tunisian protest and spread to other countries, such as Libya and Egypt, which have since witnessed mass demonstrations and pro-democracy social movements. Protests and revolutions in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen led to the ousting of leadership. Uprisings and protests also erupted in Bahrain and Syria as well as Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco and Sudan.

Bahrain: A small island country situated near the western shores of the Persian Gulf. Its neighbors include Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Since 2011, Bahrain has experienced sustained protest and unrest inspired by the Arab Spring, particularly from the majority Shi'a population.

Basmachi movement: Also known as the Basmachi revolt or insurgency, it was an uprising against Russian imperial and Soviet rule in Central Asia.

Bolshevik: (Meaning: “one of the majority.”) The term describes a member of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party. The Bolsheviks originated in a split between Lenin’s followers and the Menshevik (“one of the minority”) faction at the Second Party Congress in 1903. Led by Vladimir Lenin, the Bolsheviks seized control of the Russian government in the October Revolution in 1917.

Caliphate: A term for Islamic political-religious leadership, which centers on the “caliph” or leader.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Also known as the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, the GCC is a regional intergovernmental political and economic union consisting of all Arab states of the Persian Gulf, except for Iraq. Its member states are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Gulf War: A war waged by a coalition of 34 nations led by the U.S. against Iraq in response to Iraq’s invasion and annexation of Kuwait. The initial conflict to expel Iraqi troops from Kuwait began with an aerial and naval bombardment on Jan. 16–17, 1991, continuing for five weeks. This was followed by a ground assault

on Feb. 24. This was a decisive victory for the coalition forces, who liberated Kuwait and advanced into Iraqi territory. The coalition ceased its advance, and declared a ceasefire 100 hours after the ground campaign started.

Hamas: Short for Islamic Resistance Movement (Arabic: *Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah*) Literally “enthusiasm.” A Palestinian organization formed in 1987 during the First Intifada. Hamas serves as the Islamic Resistance Movement and branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Hamas seeks the creation of an Islamic Palestinian state based on 1967 territorial borders.

Saddam Hussein: The fifth president of Iraq, from July 16, 1979, until April 9, 2003. A leading member of the revolutionary Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party, Saddam played a key role in the 1968 coup that brought the party to power in Iraq. In 2003, a coalition led by the U.S. and U.K. invaded Iraq to depose Saddam, asserting he was in possession of weapons of mass destruction. He was captured on Dec. 13, 2003, and convicted of charges related to the 1982 killing of 148 Iraqi Shi’a and was sentenced to death by hanging in 2006.

Iranian Revolution of 1979: Refers to events involving the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who was supported by the U.S., and its eventual replacement with an Islamic republic under the Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the revolution, supported by various leftist and Islamic organizations and Iranian student movements.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS): Also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or simply Islamic State (IS). ISIS is a transnational Sunni insurgent group based in Iraq and Syria, and is led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The group has been widely labeled as a terrorist organization, including by the UN, EU, U.K., U.S., Turkey, Saudi Arabia and UAE.

Jihad: Commonly used as a noun meaning “struggle,” jihad means “to strive.” Jihad denotes a Muslim’s duty toward religious practice amid struggle. The term can refer to both spiritual and external struggle: the inner struggle of a Muslim to practice Islam or the physical struggle against religious enemies and to build a society in accordance with Islam. One who engages in jihad is a mujahid (pl: mujahideen, meaning “strugglers”).

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini: An Iranian religious leader and politician, and leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which overthrew Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran. Following the revolution, Khomeini became the country’s Supreme Leader, or “ayatollah,” a position with the highest ranking political and religious authority of the nation.

Khuzestan Province: One of the 31 provinces of Iran. It is in the southwest of the country, bordering Iraq's Basra Province and the Persian Gulf. As the most ancient Iranian province, it is often referred to as the "birthplace of the nation," as this is where the history of the Persian Empire begins.

Kurds: An ethnic group in the Middle East, mostly inhabiting a region known as Kurdistan, which spans adjacent parts of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. They speak the Kurdish language. The Kurds number about 30 million and include a significant Kurdish diaspora communities in the cities of western Turkey outside of Kurdistan.

Maronites: An ethno-religious group in the Levant. Maronites are members of the Maronite Church, the largest Eastern-rite branch of the Roman Catholic Church. They derive their name from St. Maron, a Syrian hermit, whose followers migrated to the area of Mount Lebanon (present day Republic of Lebanon) from their previous location of residence around the area of Antioch.

Millet: Once a separate legal court in the Ottoman Empire that allowed different faiths to self-rule under its own legal system. After Ottoman reforms from 1839–76, the term was used in reference to legally protected religious minority groups within the empire. The millet system of Islamic law has been called an early example of pre-modern religious pluralism.

Muslim Brotherhood (Egypt): A Sunni Islamist political, religious and social organization founded in Egypt in 1928. Although the movement spread to other Muslim countries, the Egyptian branch remains the largest in the organization, despite being declared illegal in 1954. In 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood was legalized in Egypt after the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak. Following the January 2011 revolutions, the Brotherhood established and received legal status for a new party—the Freedom and Justice Party—whose candidate, Mohammad Morsi, was elected president on June 24, 2012 (and ousted by the military in July 2013). The Egyptian court ordered the shutdown of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013 and consequently seized its assets.

Muslim Brotherhood (Global): The Muslim Brotherhood spread from Egypt to other Muslim countries through different affiliations and offshoots, creating a network of social and political movements among its adherents. It is considered a terrorist organization by the governments of Bahrain, Egypt, Russia, Syria, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.

Ottoman Empire: A Sunni Islamic empire that lasted from 1299 until 1922. At its height, the empire controlled much of Southeast Europe, Western Asia, Caucasus and North Africa. Though the empire was Muslim, it hosted many different religions and cultures within its borders, allowing minorities to practice their customs and traditions undisturbed.

Pan-Arabism: An ideology espousing the unification of the countries referred to as the "Arab World," and asserts that the Arabs constitute a unified nation. Its popularity was at its height during the 1950s and 1960s. Advocates of pan-Arabism have often espoused socialist principles and strongly opposed Western political involvement in the Arab world. It also sought to protect Arab states from outside forces by forming alliances and, to a lesser extent, economic co-operation.

Pan-Islamism: A political movement advocating the unity of Muslims under one Islamic state—often a caliphate—or an international organization similar to a European Union with Islamic principles.

Pashtuns: An Indo-European ethnicity, with populations primarily in Afghanistan and northwestern and western parts of Pakistan. They are typically characterized by the usage of the Pashto language, an Eastern Iranian language, and practice of Pashtunwali, which is a traditional set of ethics guiding individual and communal conduct.

Persian Gulf: Also known as the Arabian Gulf. Located in Western Asia between Iran to the northeast and the Arabian Peninsula to the southwest. The Gulf is an extension of the Indian Ocean through the Strait of Hormuz.

Qajars: A native Iranian royal family of Turkic origin who ruled Persia (Iran) from 1785 to 1925.

Salafism: Derived from *salaf*, meaning predecessors, the Salafis are an ultraconservative branch of Sunni Islam aimed at returning to the ancient "orthodox" teachings of Islam. Although the term salaf has appeared in Islamic religious scholarship for centuries, Salafism started as a reform-oriented movement in the 19th and 20th centuries, and was particularly Egypt-centric. Some of the most important early Salafis include Muhammad 'Abduh, Hassan al-Banna (Muslim Brotherhood founder), and Sayyid Qutb.

Shi'ism: The second largest denomination of Islam, constituting 25–30% of the world's Muslim population and 40% of the Middle East's entire population. Divided with Sunnis over the proper successor of Muhammad. Today, there is still great tension between the two denominations.

Sunni: The largest religious denomination for any religion in the world. In the schism from Shi'as, Sunnis argued that the leaders of the Muslim community didn't have to come from Mohammed's lineage. Sunnis accepted Abu Bakr as the first caliph after Mohammed.

Taliban: An Islamic fundamentalist political movement centered in Afghanistan. The movement was founded in 1994 by Mohammed Omar, its current spiritual leader, and is notorious for its strict enforcement of Sharia.

Tamil: Also known as Tamilans or simply Tamils, they are a Dravidian ethnic group that speaks Tamil as mother tongue. Tamil people with a population of about 77 million living around the world are one of the largest and oldest of the existing ethnolinguistic cultural groups of people in the modern world to exist without a nation of their own. Tamils comprise 15.36% of the population in Sri Lanka, 5.91% in India, 5.83% in Mauritius, 5% of the population in Singapore and 5.7% of the population in Malaysia.

Yazidis: A Kurdish ethno-religious community whose ancient religion Yazidism is linked to Zoroastrianism and ancient Mesopotamian religions. Yazidis mostly live in the Nineveh Province of Iraq. Smaller Yazidi communities are in Armenia, Georgia and Syria and have been in decline since the 1990s as a result of significant migration to Europe.