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RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL PARTIES

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Although the concept of the secular state would seem to imply that religion and politics do not mix, the opposite is often the case. In almost every part of the world, from Myanmar to Poland, religion is on the agenda of political parties and movements, and often the threat or fear of religious violence is a dominant theme. In some cases, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the very name signifies their dedication to advancing policies meant to protect and advance a particular religious community. In other cases, such as the British Nationalist Party, the name does not reveal the religious elements of their political positions but the targets of their ire and the foci of their restrictive policies are often particular religious groups deemed as being dangerous to the dominant religious community of the country.

The rise of violent right-wing political parties and movements around the world often have a religious character. In a fast-moving globalised world, many people feel marginalised, even when they are part of a dominant religious community. Minority religious communities become scapegoats. Both Shi’a and Sunni Muslim activists in Iraq, for example, fear the opposing religious community, and political parties and movements in Iraq have based much of their appeal on their professed ability to defend their religious communities and protect them from the violence of their perceived religious foes. Curiously, the same sentiment is voiced by supporters of right-wing Christian parties and movements in Europe and the United States where Muslims are the target of much of the anti-immigrant rhetoric of right-wing political parties.

One of the paradoxes of globalisation is that it produces anti-globalism in its wake. The rise of right-wing religious politics throughout the world, many of them strident and some of them lethal, are a sign of the backlash to the notion of global citizenship. Immigrant communities and minority groups that profess a faith different from the dominant community become targets of violent political rhetoric and policies. In the twenty-first century, the fear of the religious ‘other’ has become a major rallying cry for many political groups and parties. Implicitly they suggest that support for their policies and political leaders will protect the populace from the imagined violence of the minority groups and lead to a tough stand on such threats, including bans on new immigration and restrictions on religious minorities communities deemed to be a threat.
Religious violence in political parties in particular areas of the world

United States

Although the separation of religion and politics was inscribed in the constitution by the founding fathers of the country – particularly by Thomas Jefferson, who was adamant on the topic – religion has consistently been a feature of American political life, and violence has been a feature of its extremes. All US presidents have been professing Christians, and most of them Protestant. When John F. Kennedy, a Roman Catholic, ran for the presidency his religious affiliation was a major issue. This was not, however, such an issue when another Roman Catholic, Joe Biden, ran for the vice-presidency with Barack Obama, or when a Jew, Joe Lieberman, was the vice-presidential running mate for the unsuccessful candidacy of Al Gore. Religious themes promoting the dominant Protestant Christian community has consistently been a subtext of American political parties’ rhetoric. The great sociologist of religion, Robert Bellah, analysed the inauguration speeches of American presidents and found a consistent Christian biblical narrative (Bellah, 1967). He regarded this as a component of the civil religion of American society. Implicitly it marginalised Jews, Muslims and other minority groups professing non-Christian faiths.

This anti-religious minority theme has taken a more strident political turn in the ethnic politics of the twenty-first century, touching on religious violence. The American Freedom Party was launched in California in 2010, led by Los Angeles attorney William Daniel Johnson, with a strident anti-Semitic platform. Within the decade it had branched throughout the country and nominated candidates for president and vice president in the national elections. The larger and better-known American Independent Party was founded in 1967 primarily over racial issues, promoting the pro-segregation policies of Alabama governor George Wallace and keeping African Americans in a subservient position in society, forcibly if necessary. In recent years, however, the concerns of the party have shifted to include what it regards as the threat of violence from Muslim immigrant communities. In 2016 it embraced the presidential candidacy of Donald Trump largely because of his perceived stance against non-White immigrant groups. The most strident right-wing party in the United States is the American Nazi Party founded by George Lincoln Rockwell in 1959, which has been renamed the National Socialist Movement.

Followers of these extreme parties have been involved in violent clashes in the United States, including the 2017 confrontation in Charlottesville, Virginia between anti-immigrant groups holding a White supremacy rally and anti-fascist counter-protestors. At this rally a counter-protestor was killed when one of the supporters of the rally rammed the crowd with his vehicle. A featured speaker at the rally was Richard Spencer, founder of the National Policy Institute, a think-tank devoted to promoting White supremacy. Among the targets of its wrath are Jews and Muslim immigrants.

Religious extremism in political rhetoric became mainstream with the candidacy and election of President Donald Trump in 2016. Among the main features of his platform during the election and in his administration were xenophobic fears of foreign trade and foreign immigrants invading and changing the culture. Trump indicated that Norwegians would be welcome as immigrants, but not darker-skinned Hispanics or Muslims who, he has said, would bring criminal elements into the country (Flagg, 2018). In banning immigrants from selected Muslim countries, it was the fear of violent foreigners, including Hispanics who were Christian, but mostly those from Muslim cultures who by his definition were prone to be terrorists. Some Evangelical Christian pastors who have supported Trump claim that Islam is by nature a terrorist religion, and Protestant televangelist Pat Robertson has described it as ‘satanic’ (Kilgore, 2016).
United Kingdom

In the UK the fear of violent religious communities – particularly Muslims – has been a part of the political rhetoric surrounding Brexit, the vote to withdraw from the European Union in 2016. The primary right-wing parties have been the British Nationalist Party, founded by John Tyndall in 1982, and the British National Party, which joined other groups to create the National Front in 1967, currently led by Tony Martin. A spin-off party from the National Front in 1995 led to the creation of the National Democrats. The ideology of these parties is similar: they advocate the idea that Britain should be dominated by White Christians. One of the early suggestions was to deport all British Jews to some other location, a policy proposal that led many to compare them with Nazis. Increasingly the vitriol of the members of these parties has been against Britain’s immigration policy, especially opening doors to large numbers of Muslims from South Asian, Middle East and African locations. These parties were solidly behind the Brexit move, which they saw as a way of stalling immigration from these Muslim locales.

The Brexit vote was promoted most prominently by the small, right-wing United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), founded in 1993 and led most recently by Gerard Batten. In promoting Brexit, spokesmen such as Nigel Farage, the leader of the UKIP during the Brexit campaign, regarded Britain’s immigration rules as required by the EU’s policies as one of the main reasons for rejecting EU membership. While he thought that the influx of Eastern Europeans was part of the problem with EU membership, the huge Muslim immigrant population was what stoked the Islamophobic fears of many British who eventually voted for a British break from the EU. The UK’s immigration policies tapped into the ‘anti-Muslim populism’ that had emerged among a significant section of the British population (Trilling, 2012: 154).

After the Brexit vote UKIP has taken an even stronger anti-Muslim stand. In November 2018, it appointed Tommy Robinson, former leader of the anti-immigrant English Defence League, to be an adviser to the party. He has been called ‘the loudest Islamophobic voice in Britain’ (Peachey, 2018). Shortly after Robinson joined the party as adviser, the former leader of UKIP and its most prominent spokesman, Nigel Farage, resigned from the party in protest. Though it would appear that he wanted to distance himself from the extreme anti-Muslim sentiment of Robinson, Farage himself has been accused of stoking anti-Muslim fears during the Brexit campaign. In an interview before the Brexit vote he said he had no problem with good Muslims immigrating to the UK but had objections to those who are ‘coming here to take over’ (Bromwich, 2014). The vagueness of this category suggested that Farage and his many followers were suspicious that many Muslims were violent by nature and would upset the civil order of the country.

Europe

The anti-immigrant Islamophobic stance of the right-wing British parties that supported Brexit is mirrored by many similar parties that have prospered elsewhere in Europe in the twenty-first century. As in the UK, the fear of religious violence by imagined Muslim ‘terrorists’ has led to strident political positions that often verge on violence of their own.

By far the most successful right-wing party in Europe is Fidesz, the Hungarian Civic Alliance, headed by Victor Orbán, which came to power in the 2014 elections and maintained its control in the 2018 elections. It has garnered a reputation of being strict on immigration, especially curtailing the influx of Muslim refugees from Syria, a stance that is regarded by many observers as Islamophobic. It has also singled out the billionaire American philanthropist, George Soros, for contempt and closed down the respected Central European University in Budapest that he had founded. The focus on Soros raised the suspicion that the party was pandering to anti-Semitic
fears of Jewish financial power. In Poland a similar party, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice), founded by Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński, is the largest party in the Polish parliament.

In sheer numbers the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany is the largest in Europe with over five million votes in the 2013 federal elections. The party received just under 5 percent of the vote total, the number that would have allowed it to play a role in the government. The surprising victory of the AfD sent shock waves through the more liberal parties in Germany. Its success was attributed in part to growing German resentment over government policies that allowed large numbers of Muslim Syrian refugees to flood into the country. Several violent incidents involving Muslim refugees prior to the election was said to have contributed to the party’s support.

Elsewhere in Europe similar parties have appeared. Most notable are the National Front in France that was led by Jean-Marie Le Pen and later by his daughter, Marine Le Pen, whose rhetoric included Islamophobic and anti-Semitic overtones. Switzerland and Austria have seen the rise of right-wing anti-Muslim parties that have garnered as much as a fourth of the popular vote in national elections. In Italy, the Fratelli d’Italia (Brothers of Italy) party gained strength in the 2018 national elections in part because of fears of boatloads of new Muslim and other immigrants arriving from Africa and the Middle East on the country’s Mediterranean shores. In Northern Europe, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands have all witnessed the rise of parties that oppose immigration and the assimilation of Muslims into their societies. One of the most extreme acts of terrorism in recent European history was the 2011 attack of Anders Breivik on a youth camp hosted by the pro-multicultural Norwegian Labour Party, killing 69 young people, in protest against what Breivik thought was the party’s permission for a Muslim takeover of Northern Europe (Juergensmeyer, 2017).

Turkey

In the early twentieth century when Turkey was transitioning to a nation-state following the end of the Ottoman Empire, its emphasis on Turkish ethnic nationalism alienated non-Muslim and non-Turkish communities in the extreme. The deportation and destruction of large groups of Armenians, Syrian, Greek, Assyrian and Chaldean Christians has been described as genocide, a term rejected by Turkish officials, but generally accepted as fact by much of the rest of the world.

This attitude of marginalisation towards non-Muslim and non-ethnically Turkish groups has continued even though the politics of the country has been dominated by the secular philosophy of Turkey’s modern founder, Kemal Ataturk. In recent years that secular political culture has been challenged by a new political party, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (the Justice and Development Party, commonly known by its Turkish initials, AKP), though the situation of minority communities has not improved. The party, led by Recep Erdoğan, came to power in 2002. Though he has quarrelled with the secular Kemalists over policies that would liberalise the use of the Muslim headscarf and other policies in line with Muslim sentiments, his main fights have been with other Sunni Muslims, primarily ethnic Kurds and followers of the Gülen movement. With the Kurds his opposition is primarily ethnic; he sees them as separatist. With the Gülenists, however, his hostility is directed towards a religious movement led by a former cleric, Fethullah Gülen, who has lived in the United States since 1999 in a retreat centre in Pennsylvania’s Pocono Mountains. The movement involves a cluster of various social service and educational organisations united in their ascription to Gülen’s philosophy, which advocates a modern and moderate Islam in tune with multicultural societies.

Initially the relations between Erdoğan’s AKP and the Gülen movement were mutually supportive in a political alliance. Around 2011 cracks began to emerge in the alliance, in part
over criticism of Gülen-related journalists, judges and other officials regarding what they observed to be mounting corruption within the AKP in general and more specifically among Erdoğan’s closest allies and family. Erdoğan blamed the Gülen movement for launching the investigations that incriminated him and his associates in corruption, and blamed it for trying to take over the government. Erdoğan closed down the Gülen-related newspaper, Zaman, which had one of the largest circulations in Turkey, and in May 2016, declared the Gülen movement to be a terrorist organisation. A few weeks later, on 15 July 2016, a mysterious coup attempt was launched, killing over 300, but was quickly quelled. Erdoğan immediately blamed the Gülen movement and Gülen personally for orchestrating the coup. Subsequently he has expelled or imprisoned tens of thousands of teachers, journalists, administrators and others related to Gülen’s Hizmet movement. Erdoğan has demanded the extradition of Gülen to Turkey to be put on trial for his alleged terrorist plots, but the US State Department has denied the requests owing to a lack of credible evidence of any crime.

Egypt

The Egyptian constitution does not allow political parties to organise on the basis of religion, though religion has been an aspect of many political parties in the country, and religious-related parties have been the subject of violence and persecution. After the Arab Spring when the dramatic massive demonstrations in Cairo’s Tahrir Square and elsewhere throughout the country in 2011 led to the ouster of strongman Hosni Mubarak, an arena for democracy was opened and political parties could contend freely in national elections. The largest Islamist movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, created the Hizb al-Ḥurriyyah wa al-ʿAdala (Freedom and Justice Party) which ran on a plank of Islamic values, though it was careful to include Egyptian Christians as part of the party’s leadership. In the 2012 elections the party received the largest number of votes, and on 20 June 2012, the party’s leader, Mohamed Morsi, was installed as prime minister.

Though it had come to power with the appearance of a moderate and tolerant Islamic political stance, within a matter of months the new government attempted to revise the constitution, institute hard-line Islamist policies, and curtail the power of the judiciary in what some observers described as an ‘Islamist coup’ (El Rashidi, 2013). Many of the young people who had protested in Tahrir Square during the Arab Spring felt that their revolution had been hijacked for undemocratic Islamist purposes, and new protests against the Morsi regime emerged throughout the country. On 3 July 2013, in response to the protests, the leader of the military, General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, ousted Morsi, outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood and its Freedom and Justice Party, and took direct control of the government. It was a move supported at the time by democratic opposition groups, the Grand Imam, and the Coptic Christian Pope. It was anticipated that al-Sisi would quickly call for new elections. He did, although it was held a year later. The winner was al-Sisi himself, who assumed office on 8 June 2014. Since then he has solidified his power in a regime that is often described as more autocratic than Mubarak’s reign.

Al-Sisi has also ruthlessly destroyed his political enemies, including the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party, in what he described as crackdowns on terrorism. In protests organised by the Muslim Brotherhood against what it described as al-Sisi’s abrogation of democratic rule, al-Sisi ordered the national police to use any means necessary to break up peaceful protests that were organised against him. In protests in Cairo in August 2013, police action led to the deaths of over 600 protestors with over 4,000 injured. In March 2014, the courts under al-Sisi’s urging sentenced over five hundred Muslim Brotherhood protesters to death and by May 2016 the British Broadcasting Corporation reported that over 40,000 followers of the movement had been imprisoned (BBC, 2016).
Iraq and Syria

In Iraq, the ouster of the dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003 by a coalition of military forces led by the United States led to a vacuum of political power. It was soon filled by the organisation of political parties and movements, many of which were based on religious affiliation. Competition among these rival religious-related political groups has led to much of the violence in the country in the first two decades of the twenty-first century (Juergensmeyer, 2017).

Shi’a Muslims constitute 60 percent of Iraq’s population, so it is understandable that Shi’a political parties dominate post-Saddam governments. The largest Shi’a party is the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (al-Majlis al-alalith-thaura l-islamiyya fil-Iraq), though compromises among the leading Shi’a groups led to the installation of Nouri al Maliki, leader of the Islamic Dawa Party (Hizb al-Da’wa al-Islamiyya) as prime minister of Iraq from 2006 to 2014. Left out of this Shi’a coalition was the firebrand Shi’a cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr, and his Sadr militia. It was members of this militia that were accused of violence against the US occupation forces and Sunni Arabs in the years following the end of Saddam’s regime. In 2018 Sadr became directly engaged in the national elections and his Sairoon alliance won the largest number of seats. A power-sharing agreement later in the year, however, led to a more moderate coalition government that in October 2018 selected Adil Abdul-Mahdi as prime minister.

On the Sunni Muslim side of Iraqi politics, the official Sunni party, the Iraqi Islamic Party, has sided with both al Maliki and his successor, Haider al-Abadi, in the coalition governments in Baghdad. The unofficial political organisations, however, have included violent activists, including supporters of al Qaeda in Iraq. This movement, led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, orchestrated a reign of terror in 2004–2006 aimed primarily at the US occupation force and secondarily at the Shi’a government in Baghdad and moderate Sunni leaders. After Zarqawi was captured and killed by US military the movement survived and its leadership eventually was passed to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who reconstituted the movement under a new name, the Islamic State (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, greater Syria, or ISIS).

ISIS prospered in Syria in the second decade of the twenty-first century for the same reason that al Qaeda in Iraq flourished for a time in that country: it fed on the disaffection of Sunni Arabs who felt marginalised from the political culture. In Iraq the Sunnis were in the numerical minority. In Syria they were in the majority, but the regime of Bashar al Assad was led by a kind of Shi’a religious community, the Alawites, which many Sunnis felt had excluded them from public life. In the protests against Assad after Arab Spring in 2012 that led to a civil war in the country, radical Islamic groups such as al Nusra and the Islamic State provided the organisation and military might to be effective vehicles for Sunni Muslim opposition to Assad.

In 2014 the Islamic State forces were able to mount a blitzkrieg across eastern Syria and western Iraq. Within weeks they had conquered large sections of the two countries with over ten million people under their control, including the major Syrian city of Raqqa and the second largest Iraqi city, Mosul. Within days of capturing Mosul, al Baghdadi appeared on the parapet of the main mosque and declared himself caliph of the Islamic State. The regime lasted until 2018, sustained largely through violence and a reign of terror against its own citizens as well as its enemies. Thousands died, some in the most intentionally sensational manners. Videos of beheadings and execution by flames were posted on the internet and contributed to the movement’s reputation for abject brutality.

Myanmar

In Myanmar religious violence has taken an ugly turn in recent years, fostered in part by the prevailing political parties. During the time of its independence in 1948, the country known at
that time as Burma, leaders such as Aung San were tolerant of the religious minorities in the country, including Christian tribal groups in the north and east and Muslims in the northwest. The first prime minister, U Nu, included Muslims from the Rohingya ethnic community in his cabinet. Nonetheless relations with both Christian and Muslim minorities have been rocky over the years, including during the long period of military rule.

In 2010 with the liberalisation of politics and the freedom of political parties to contest elections, Muslims were often targeted as scapegoats for Buddhists nationalists’ fears that their culture was under assault. In the 2015 elections, the military-backed party, Union Solidarity and Development, was said to have been stoking fears of Muslim terrorism in the country and the need for a strong party to control them and promote the country’s Buddhist identity. Nonetheless, the opposition party, the National League for Democracy, won the elections, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of Aung San, the general who had been the leader of Burma’s independence movement. The military maintained control of the police and army within the country, however, and these agencies have been blamed for the crackdown on the Rohingya Muslim minority community.

According to a March 2018 report from the Association of Southeast Asian Countries (ASEAN), over 40,000 Muslims were killed in the anti-Rohingya pogroms in Myanmar from 2015 to 2018 (ASEAN, 2018). The military’s political party has been accused of allowing a strident anti-Muslim monk, Ashin Wirathu, to incite angry Buddhists mobs to riot against the Muslim minority, burning mosques and Muslim-owned shops and houses. In the town of Meiktila, a Buddhist mob surrounded a Muslim man and set him on fire. The prevailing anti-Muslim religious nationalism in the country, promoted by the military’s party, has put Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy Party in a difficult situation where it feels it cannot speak out for the human rights of the Rohingya people without risking political repercussions (Juergensmeyer, 2015).

**Pakistan and India**

Although Pakistan was founded in 1948 to be a secular nation the politics of the country have become increasingly Islamicised over the years, especially under the regime of General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq, who came to power in a military coup in 1977 and ruled until his death in 1988. Zia formed alliances with right-wing religious parties, especially the Jamaa-e-Islami, and promoted politics that not only favoured Islam within the political culture of the nation but also marginalised non-Muslim religious communities, including Sikhs and Christians. A heresy law allows for punishment, including death, of those accused of assaulting Islam. Most of the victims of this law have been Christian. In the twenty-first century, right-wing Islamist religious parties have fielded candidates who have been accused of being terrorists by the United States and India, including cleric Hafeez Sayeed, whom the Indian government has accused of being complicit in the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack that killed 166 people (Reuters, 2018).

In India, the violent struggle between the Sikh separatist Khalistan movement and the Indian government led to thousands of deaths in the 1980s (Juergensmeyer, 2017). Although some members of the Sikh political party, the Akali Dal, joined the movement, most leaders of the party opposed it. After the uprising was defeated, some of former leaders of the separatist movement have created their own political parties. Simranjit Singh Mann, once accused of masterminding the assassination plot that killed Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, has led the Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) Party, though it has fared with little success in Punjab state elections.

The pro-Hindu policies of the ruling political party in India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has made it arguably the largest religious party in the world. In the 2014 national elections it won an outright majority allowing it to create the federal government without coalition support. The prime minister was named Narendra Modi, who had been Chief Minister of the state of Gujarat.
where he and his political allies had been implicated in an incident of religious violence. In 2002, Hindu mobs had attacked innocent Muslims in the outskirts of the city of Ahmedabad and over two thousand were killed, often by having been savagely beaten or tossed alive onto burning fires (Ghassam-Fachandi, 2012). Modi was said to have encouraged the mobs. After an investigation no formal charges were levied against him, though international human rights groups blacklisted him and he was not allowed to visit the United States until after he was named prime minister. A member of Modi’s cabinet, BJP member Maya Kadnani, was brought to trial and convicted of terrorism for her role in actively encouraging the mobs in the midst of the riot.

China

Though the ruling Communist Party of China is officially atheist, the party’s government does recognise the existence of five ‘religions’: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism (though the last two are, of course, branches of one religious tradition, Christianity). Officially sanctioned organisations related to these five religions have been allowed to practice after the liberation of religion in China in 1982. They are closely monitored and controlled by the government, however, and upstart groups within these religions and sects that fall outside the category of officially sanctioned religious organisations have clashed with the government, sometimes violently. In 2018 the government cracked down on unauthorised Christian churches, destroying them, taking down crosses, burning bibles and destroying church buildings. Some Christians have been killed in attempting to keep their places of worship from being demolished (Galli, 2018). Attempts to quash the Chinese meditation movement, Falun Gong, have led to incarceration and torture. According to investigative journalist Ethan Gutmann, tens of thousands of Falun Gong prisoners were killed in order to harvest their organs for transplant (Gutmann, 2014).

Muslim Uighurs in western China have also been under attack, in part because some activist Uighur separatists have instigated violent acts of terrorism against the government. Since 2014 Uighurs in Xinxiang Province have been placed in massive re-education camps, and in 2018 the numbers swelled to over 100,000. The efforts to make Uighurs more Chinese in these camps include lessons in Mandarin. The Chinese government has also curtailed some aspects of Muslim religious practice including the use of ‘abnormal beards and unusual names’ (Bristow, 2018).

Global context

The rise of religious nationalism around the world at the end of the twentieth century and first decades of the twenty-first has led to situations where religious violence is an aspect of the policies of, and opposition to, political parties. Extremist political groups in one country are encouraged and supported by those in others. Some of the first responses to the victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential elections, for instance, were scenes of cheering right-wing Hindu BJP supporters in India.

In other cases, religious violence promoted by a political group in one part of the world have been countered by political responses elsewhere in the world. An example is the incident that led to the protracted Benghazi investigations by Republican committees in the US Congress that was a mainstay of the Republican Party’s political accusations against former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, especially during her unsuccessful candidacy for US president in 2016.

The incident began with a 2012 attack on the US Consulate in Benghazi, Libya that killed four American staff members, including the US Ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens. It was not a random mob. Truckloads of militia attacked the Consulate and a mortar attack eventually demolished the building and killed the Ambassador. The militants were likely jihadis, either al
Qaeda-related or Saudi-funded from a neighbouring town that had been a centre of anti-American activism in the early years of the Iraq war. In attacking the US Consulate they were also trying to delegitimise the moderate Libyan government that had rejected the extremists even as it was accepting US government support.

In the US Congress investigations were mounted and accusations were made that Hillary Clinton, as US Secretary of State, had allowed the attack to happen. Five committees in the Republican-controlled US House of Representatives and two in the Republican-controlled Senate conducted investigations and held hearings over several years, though no evidence of wrong-doing or criminal charges were ever advanced against her. Public support for the hearings were bolstered by a movie, 13 Hours: The Secret Soldiers of Benghazi, which implicated Secretary Clinton but which critics decried as based on false or misleading information. During the 2016 presidential election campaign the Benghazi issue was widely criticised by Democrats as an attempt to use an incident of religious violence for xenophobic political purposes. As such it is an example of the globalisation of the politics of religious violence and its utility for political parties.

References


