

## Glossary

**Arab**—both a people and a culture. Originally those who dwelt in the desert areas of the Middle East. Some were nomadic herders, some were engaged in agriculture in oases and on the edge of the desert, and some existed by trade or raiding. As a culture the term more widely refers to those people who speak Arabic and are part of the traditions of the Middle East.

**Alawi**—an esoteric offshoot of Islam. Its center is in the coastal Jebel Alawi (“Alawi mountains”) in modern coastal Syria.

**Ba’athist Party**—from Arabic *ba’atha*, “to resurrect.” A pan-Arab, leftist, secular movement, founded by Michel Aflaq, a Christian, in 1945. It is still the ruling party in Syria and was the ruling party in Iraq, although the Syrian Ba’athists and Iraqi Ba’athists are not friendly toward each other.

**bedouins**—nonsettled dwellers of the desert areas of the Middle East. Sometimes they are divided into sheep, donkey, and camel bedouins. Each group has a different range of habitation, occupation, and mobility.

**caliph (caliphate)**—Arabic, literally, “successor, vicar.” Those who were chosen to lead the Muslim community after the death of Muhammad. They were his successors in terms of political power and, to some extent, religious leadership. They did not, however, succeed him as prophets.

**Crusades**—eleventh- to thirteenth-century military pilgrimages to regain Christian holy places in Palestine from Muslim control.

**Druze**—an esoteric offshoot of Isma’ili Islam. It is not considered part of traditional, orthodox Sunni or Shi’ite Islam. It can be found in Israel, Lebanon, and Syria.

**Fatah**—Arabic, “victory.” The name is derived from a backwards reading of the initial letters of the Arabic for Movement for the National Liberation of Palestine. It is the largest party of the many-partied Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). It is, generally speaking, nationalist and secular.

**Hamas**—an acronym derived from the first three letters of the Arabic for Islamic Resistance Movement. It was founded in 1987 by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and its charter refuses to recognize the existence of Israel in any form. It is presently in conflict with Fatah and has taken control of Gaza.

**intifadah**—Arabic “tremor, shaking off, popular uprising.” Two popular uprisings (1987–1993 and September 2000–present) of Palestinians against Israeli occupation are known as intifadahs.

**jihad**—from Arabic, *jahada*, “to struggle, endeavor, exert oneself.” Technically the “greater jihad” is the struggle against one’s baser instincts, similar to Christian asceticism. The “lesser jihad” is the armed struggle against aggression and injustice. Traditionally the circumstances for jihad and who is authorized to declare it have been strictly circumscribed and limited.

**Kurd**—a non-Semitic ethnic group inhabiting primarily parts of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. Most, though not all, Kurds are Muslims.

**Levant**—eastern part of the Mediterranean, including islands and countries.

**Maronite**—a group of Catholic Eastern rite Christians dating back to the fifth–seventh centuries CE. They form the major Christian group in Lebanon.

**Muslim**—literally, “one who makes” *islam*, literally, “submission” to God, by proclaiming belief that there is no God but God and that Muhammad is the messenger of God.

**Mutasarrif**—a secondary administrative unit in the Ottoman Empire. It is smaller than the more common and important *vilayet* and similar to a state or province.

**Ottoman Empire**—Muslim Empire comprising the Middle East, parts of eastern Europe, and North Africa. Its name derives from the Usmanli group of Turks who founded it. It existed from the fourteenth century until its dissolution in 1922, after being on the losing side in World War II.

**Semite**—derived from the name of Shem, one of the sons of Noah (see Gen. 9:18–28). As a linguistic term it refers to a family of languages to which Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, and others belong. As an ethnic term it is not precise and probably best avoided in all but the most generic sense.

**Shi’ite**—one of the two large groupings in Islam. The name derives from their being the *shi’ah*, “party, faction of Aly,” the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet and the fourth Caliph. There are two main groups of Shi’ites: Seveners hold to a succession of seven Imams; this is the smaller group to which Isma’ilis belong. Twelvers,

who hold to a succession of twelve Imams, form the larger group. Twelver Shi'ite Islam is the official religion of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the majority religion in southern Iraq.

**Sunni**—those who follow the *sunna*, “traditions, practices” of the Prophet. Sunnis form about 85 percent of the Muslim population of the world.

**Wahhabi**—a (sometimes derogatory) term derived from the name of the conservative Arabian reformer Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703–1790). It is a particularly conservative strand of Islam that rejects as innovation, that is, heretical, anything that goes beyond the literal understanding of the Qur'an and sunna. It is the official form of Islam of Saudi Arabia. It should be noted that *Wahhabi* is not a term these people use of themselves. They prefer the term *Salafi*, which derived from the Arabic *ak-salaf*, “the pious ancestors.”