

The Cold War's Clash of Civilizations: The Soviet Union, the Left, and the International Origins of Islamism

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Historians have long understood the Cold War as a global conflict that transformed not only Europe but also the Third World. The conflict between the USA and the USSR influenced the competition between socialism and Islamism. It also shaped sectarianism among Sunni and Shi'a Islamists themselves. During the 1960s, Sunni and Shi'a Islamists like Sayyid Qutb, Burhanuddin Rabbani, and Ali Khamenei engaged in an ecumenical debate about how to rid the Islamic world of its secular, socialist, and often pro-Soviet regimes. These Sunni and Shi'a thinkers were divided on theological matters, but united in opposition to socialism. The following years saw the reinvention of Islamic internationalism through the Shi'a clergy and the World Islamic League. Groups like these delegitimized Marxism and forged new transnational networks of authority. They also contributed to the defeat of the Soviet Union and socialists in Afghanistan. Yet after Shi'a Islamists seized power in Iran in 1979, the Sunni Islamist networks built to challenge socialism were repurposed to contain Shi'ism. Studying "the Cold War's clash of civilizations" between socialism and Islamism reveals how Muslim intellectuals encountered "the West" not only through the guise of Euro-America and liberal capitalism. It also sheds light on the Cold War origins of today's sectarian struggles for leadership of the Islamic world.

Projektbeteiligte

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