

Jihad – The Trail of Political Islam by Gilles Kepel.  
I.B. Tauris, 2002.

The word Jihad is one of the most commonly used and misunderstood in regular parlance today, and because of its miscomprehension the largest single contributor to the widespread negative view of Islam in society in general.

In Jihad – The Trail of Political Islam, renowned Middle East expert Gilles Keppel explores in encyclopaedic detail the 20<sup>th</sup> century rise of Islamism throughout the Middle East and beyond, charting country by country the growth of extremist Islamic groups and the way they have influenced and sought to influence both their own societies and those further afield.

Gripped as we still are in the shock engendered by the attacks on America in September 2001, this is a timely analysis, and one of its most helpful dimensions is the tracing of the path that led to the formation of the Taliban in the Moslem schools of Pakistan and the transformation of Afghanistan into a mecca for Islamic terrorists and those with an almost pathological hatred for all things non-Islamic.

Dr Keppel's final conclusions are, however, more reassuring than the reader's journey through the book might lead one to expect. Keppel believes that Islamic extremism has done more damage to its cause than anything else, and that, the occasional spasm apart, Islam will not come to terms with the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the overwhelming force of Western civilisation other than by compromise and accommodation with democratic ideals. For all our sakes we must hope that the thesis of the author of this fascinating and illuminating work is correct.

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