

# War and Martyrdom in the Twentieth Century and After

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the claim that there is a striking contrast between memory regimes in operation today in different parts of the world. They are differentiated by their approach to martyrdom. The presence of the terms “martyr” and “martyrdom” and their correlates varies over time and space, increasing in frequency and significance the further east you go. In Western Europe, the term martyr faded from use rapidly and irreversibly in the twentieth century; in Eastern Europe, it is still alive and well, informing a host of national and religious movements; and in the Middle East and beyond, the term is not only present but at times radioactive. Islamic radicalism is incomprehensible without it, and so are other political movements in middle Asia and the Far East. This paper explores the way the language of martyrdom frames memory and history in different places and in very different ways in the early twenty-first century.*

As a prelude to the essays which follow, I want to examine the claim that there is a tripartite set of memory regimes in operation in different parts of the world today. They are differentiated by their approach to martyrdom. The presence of the terms “martyr” and “martyrdom” and their correlates varies over time and space, increasing in frequency and significance the further east you go. In Western Europe, the term martyr has faded from use rapidly and irreversibly in the twentieth century; in Eastern Europe, it is still alive and well, informing a host of national and religious movements; and in the Middle East and beyond, the term is not only present but at times radioactive. Islamic radicalism is incomprehensible without it, and so are other political movements in middle Asia and the Far East. This spatial model of sacred and secular forms of remembrance is