ISLAMISTS *in a* CHANGING MIDDLE EAST

Edited by Marc Lynch

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PROJECT ON MIDDLE EAST POLITICAL SCIENCE

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Acknowledgments

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أبراج الهمداني
ارحل
Go out

Islamist Movements After the Arab Uprising

By Marc Lynch, June 7, 2012

In December 2011, I joined my George Washington University colleague Nathan Brown for an extended conversation with Deputy Supreme Guide of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Khairet el-Shater. The timing was oddly propitious, in that Brown had just published an outstanding book about Islamist parties in the Arab world entitled "When Victory is Not an Option." But, as we explored with Shater, victory did suddenly seem to be a real possibility for the Muslim Brotherhood. How would this sudden opportunity, after decades of participation in an authoritarian system that would not allow them to actually win, affect their behavior, their ideology, or their internal organization?

While Shater could only speculate about how the new environment would change the Brotherhood, the organization's behavior suggested — at best — confusion. Shater himself was nominated as a candidate for the presidency, after the Brotherhood had insisted for months that it would not field one (after Shater's disqualification, his place was taken by Mohamed Morsi, who advanced to the run-off to be held on June 18). This followed massive Islamist victories in parliamentary elections, their controversial domination of the selection of an assembly to write a new constitution, and growing mistrust and anger between them and revolutionary forces upset with their failure to support street protests against the military leadership. For many, the Muslim Brotherhood seemed to be gambling to seize all power in the new Egypt…even as their own leaders saw themselves as besieged on all sides.

The rise of Islamist power in Egypt had parallels across the region, as Islamist parties took leading roles in post-revolutionary Tunisia and Libya, played a key part in the Syrian and Yemeni uprisings, and won elections in Morocco and Kuwait. The rise of Islamist movements in the Arab countries that have undergone political upheavals over the last year has startled and disturbed many once-enthusiastic observers. Pessimists lament that the "Arab Spring" has given way to an "Islamic Winter," and warn gloomily that the overthrowing of dictators is only empowering a new generation of religious fanatics. But it is far too soon for such despair. Islamist movements were well positioned to take advantage of political openings, and have indeed taken the lead in many of the transitions. The once repressed and tightly controlled Islamist movements are now in the position to at least attempt to act on their beliefs.

Their success should not have come as a surprise. These movements have been reshaping the public culture of the Arab world for decades, and have long been the best-organized and most popular political movements in most Arab countries. No observer of the region could have failed to note the steady growth of Islamic public culture or the formidable political machines of Muslim Brotherhood-style movements wherever they were allowed to operate. Islamists were naturally well positioned to take advantage of the political openings in many Arab states that followed the great protest wave of 2011. But who are these movements? What do they want? And how will they shape — and be shaped by —the new politics of the region?

This collection of essays from the Middle East Channel on *ForeignPolicy.com* offers deep insights into the evolution of the Islamist movements which are playing such a crucial role in the unfolding of a new Middle East. They offer accessible, deeply informed analysis that can help to correct many of the misconceptions about such movements while also drawing attention to very real dangers. In the essays to follow, academic experts and journalists on the ground go deep inside Islamic parties in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Morocco, and more. These essays were written in real time, in response to particular circumstances and challenges, and have been only lightly edited and updated for this volume in order to retain the urgency and passion with which they were written. The essays offer snapshots of a political moment, informed by deep experience and long study of these movements and the countries within which they operate. They have enduring value.

One point which quickly emerges from the essays is simply how disorienting the newly open political vistas have been for Islamists. It is not only foreign observers who have miscalculated. At one point in the summer of 2011, a leader of the Egyptian Salafi party, al-Nour, told me that if all went well his party might win four or five seats; it won over 100. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood was comfortable in opposition but now has struggled to deal with its own ascendance, as it suffers internal fissures and unprecedented public scrutiny. Ennahda may have swept elections, but only two years ago it did not even exist inside of Tunisia and has faced great challenges in re-establishing itself. The same can be said of Libyan and Syrian Islamists who for many years were forced to operate underground or in exile.

Another is the extent to which the Islamists themselves are divided, confused, and struggling to adapt to the new realities that they confront. The Muslim Brotherhood is not al Qaeda, the Global Muslim Brotherhood Organization exercises little control over its national branches, and Salafi and Muslim Brotherhood parties are competing furiously for votes. Islamist political parties have to calculate their strategy in uncertain legal and political environments, weigh both domestic and international calculations, and decide how to reconcile their ideals with the demands of practical politics. Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood finds itself facing such suspicion from angry revolutionaries that many, shockingly, seem prepared to vote instead for the old regime's candidate Ahmed Shafiq.

The success of these movements is difficult to dispute, at least in the short term. In Tunisia, the Islamist Ennahda party emerged from decades of complete exclusion from public life to sweep the foundational election and dominate the constitutional assembly. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood and new Salafi parties dominated the first parliamentery elections and the constitutional assembly that followed. In Morocco, the Justice and Development Party (PJD) took a plurality of seats in parliamentary elections called following the king's limited constitutional reforms. Islamist groups of various forms played a key role in both the Libyan and Syrian uprisings and the violence that followed. There is little doubt that Islamist movements will do well in almost any country that allows elections in the coming years.

The exercise of power also poses significant challenges to all such movements. Some expect them to quickly move to impose Islamic law, but at least some Islamist leaders may understand that this would quickly provoke a national and international backlash. How, one wonders, will Muslim Brothers or Salafis in leading roles in an Egyptian government deal with the need to take IMF or World Bank loans to rescue the economy, when the Islamic sharia forbids the charging or paying of interest? How will they deal with the need to coordinate policies toward Gaza with Israel?

There is nothing new about Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Islamist movements taking part in Arab electoral politics. For decades, such movements have taken advantage of every opportunity to contest elections, partly to gain a share of power and partly as a way to reach out into communities and spread the Islamic message. Such parties enjoyed great electoral success in countries as different as Jordan, Egypt, and Kuwait. They relied on an elaborate, well-developed jurisprudence which provided Islamic sanction for such democratic participation. And they consistently avowed their democratic commitments, in the face of varying degrees of pressure from autocratic regimes. Those on the outside who advocated democratic change in the Arab world could not avoid defending these mainstream Islamist movements when they took the brunt of the repressive power of autocratic regimes. This did not make the Islamists liberals, however, as serious "grey zones" remained in their views toward women, minorities, and freedoms.

The authoritarian realities of these regimes created something of a safety net for these political Islamists. Since there was never any real possibility that they could come to power through the ballot box, they were rarely forced to choose between their Islamist ideology and

their democratic commitments. They could posture as democratic reformists, highlighting corruption or repression, without having to signal whether they would use a position of power to impose their vision of Islamic morality on others. The Arab uprisings have removed that buffer, forcing many of these movements to confront for the first time the opportunity to actually dominate.

Despite their long experience of politics, therefore, their confusion in this new situation has been palpable. Tunisia's Ennahda has for the most part carefully reassured others of its commitment to toleration and cooperation. But Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood has taken an ever more aggressive political stance which has alienated many of its non-Islamist counterparts. If Islamists backed away from promises to not field a presidential candidate, could they be trusted to not later seek to impose their religious views on secularists or religious minorities? The absence of constitutions or mutually agreed rules of the game raised the stakes enormously. The same democracy advocates who once defended the Islamists against regime repression now should legitimately hold them accountable for their own behavior.

The participation of Salafi parties in democratic politics is more novel, however. While some Salafi parties had entered the political fray in the Gulf prior to the Arab uprisings, there had rarely been anything quite like the electoral rise of Egypt's al-Nour Party. Salafi movements had for decades rejected democracy on principle, as apostasy which replaced the rule of God with the rule of man. The enthusiasm with which these movements now entered the electoral fray suggests that even Islamist movements may yet wear their ideology lightly and adapt to new circumstances. But the harsh rhetoric and radical views of many of these inexperienced Salafi politicians shocked local and foreign audiences alike. So did their electoral success, which exceeded even their own expectations.

Islamist political participation is thus fraught with risks, challenges, and fears. There are good reasons for secularists or liberals to worry about what such movements might do with state power. But we should not lose sight of the importance of the fact that Islamists of all stripes have now decisively opted to accept the legitimacy of the democratic game. It is far better to have such groups inside the democratic process than to have them as marginalized outsiders — as long as they are willing to respect democratic rules, public freedoms, and the toleration of others.

This marks a dramatic change since the bleak days following September 11, 2001, when extremist views and violent rhetoric dominated views of Islamism. The appeal of violent jihadism has clearly faded, at least for now, and few Islamists still openly reject the principle of democracy. Al Qaeda itself has struggled to adapt to the Arab uprisings, with the American killing of Osama bin Laden marking at least a symbolic ending to a decade dominated by a so-called "War on Terror." But it would be wrong to assume that this will necessarily last. Indeed, one could easily imagine the appeal of jihadism returning with a vengeance should democratic politics fail or should Islamist politicians compromise so much that they alienate purists in their ranks. And, of course, state collapse and protracted civil strife in countries such as Yemen or Syria could create new opportunities for jihadists to regroup.

These Islamist gains do not mean the rise of any kind of unified Islamic bloc across the Middle East and North Africa, however. Islamists are deeply divided amongst themselves about political strategy and how to wield political authority. Some hope to immediately impose Islamic cultural policies, while others prefer to focus on economic development. Even similar types of parties take very different forms in different countries. Participation in politics is already changing these movements, strengthening some factions and weakening others. What is more, their very success carries the seeds of a backlash — both from frightened liberals, and from Islamist purists disgusted by the compromises necessary to political power. And finally, the experience of the 1950s and 1960s bears recalling, when pan-Arabist dominated states such as Iraq, Syria, and Egypt proved bitter rivals rather than easy allies under the banner of Gamal Abed Nasser.

The essays collected in this volume capture the complexity and the uncertainty of the new Islamism in the rapidly transforming Middle East. They offer no easy answers. Instead, they present deeply informed analysis of these movements as they have confronted new challenges and seized new opportunities. They show the Islamist movements in all their similarities and differences, their struggles and their advances, and their troubled engagement with a rapidly changing Middle East. Tunisia and Egypt are covered in great depth, as befits their status as the first successful uprisings and the most advanced in the process of political transition. But the essays also cover Islamist movements in Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen, and beyond.

Marc Lynch is associate professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University where he is the director of the Institute of Middle East Studies and Project on Middle East Political Science. Follow him @abuaardvark.

Chapter 1

The NEW ISLAMIC LANDSCAPE

The New Islamists

By Olivier Roy, April 16, 2012

The following is an excerpt from the book The Islamists Are Coming: Who They Really Are, which was released on April 18 by the U.S. Institute of Peace and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

The longstanding debate over whether Islam and democracy can coexist has reached a stunning turning point. Since the Arab uprisings began in late 2010, political Islam and democracy have become increasingly interdependent. The debate over whether they are compatible is now virtually obsolete. Neither can now survive without the other.

In Middle Eastern countries undergoing political transitions, the only way for Islamists to maintain their legitimacy is through elections. Their own political culture may still not be democratic, but they are now defined by the new political landscape and forced in turn to redefine themselves — much as the Roman Catholic Church ended up accepting democratic institutions even as its own practices remained oligarchic.

At the same time, democracy will not set down roots in Arab countries in transition without including mainstream Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Ennahda in Tunisia, or al-Islah in Yemen. The so-called Arab Spring cleared the way for the Islamists. And even if many Islamists do not share the democratic culture of the demonstrators, the Islamists have to take into account the new playing field the demonstrations created.

The debate over Islam and democracy used to be a chicken-and-egg issue: Which came first? Democracy has certainly not been at the core of Islamist ideology. Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood has historically been strictly centralized and obedient to a supreme guide, who rules for life. And Islam has certainly not been factored into promotion of secular democracy. Indeed, skeptics long argued that the two forces were even anathema to each other.

But the outside world wrongly assumed that Islam would first have to experience a religious reformation before its followers could embark on political democratization — replicating the Christian experience when the Protestant Reformation gave birth to the Enlightenment and then modern democracy. In fact, however, liberal Muslim intellectuals had little impact in either inspiring or directing the Arab uprisings. The original protesters in Cairo's Tahrir Square referred to democracy as a universal concept, not to any sort of Islamic democracy.

The development of both political Islam and democracy now appears to go hand-in-hand, albeit not at the same pace. The new political scene is transforming the Islamists as much as the Islamists are transforming the political scene.

Today, the question of Islam's compatibility with democracy does not center on theological issues, but rather on the concrete way believers recast their faith in a rapidly changing political environment. Liberal or fundamentalist, the new forms of religiosity are individualistic and more in tune with the democratic ethos.

The Evolution

When Islamism gained ground during the 1970s and 1980s, it was initially dominated by revolutionary movements and radical tactics. Over the next 30 years, however, the religious revival in Arab societies diversified, and social shifts reined in radicalism. The toll of death and destruction that radical Islamism left in its wake also diverted interest in militancy.

Even the proliferation of media free from overbearing state control played a role. In the mid-1990s, Al Jazeera became the first independent satellite television station in the Arab world. Within a generation, there were more than 500 such stations. Many offered a wide range of religious programming — from traditional sheikhs to liberal Muslim thinkers — which in turn introduced the idea of diversity. Suddenly, there was no single truth in a religion that has preached one path to God for 14 centuries.

Islamists also changed both through victory and defeat — or a combination. Shiite Islamists won a political victory in Iran's 1979 revolution, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini rose to power. But three decades later, the world's only modern theocracy was increasingly ostracized by the world, leading many Islamists to ask, "What went wrong?"

In Algeria, Sunni Islamists were pushed aside in a military coup on the eve of an election victory in 1992. The party was banned, its

leaders imprisoned. A more militant faction then took on the military, and more than 100,000 people were killed in a decade-long civil war. The bloody aftermath of the Arab world's first democratic election had a ripple effect on the calculations of Islamist groups across the region.

As a result of their experience with the power of government repression, Islamists increasingly compromised to get in, or stay in, the political game. In Egypt, the Muslim Brothers ran for parliament whenever allowed, often making tactical alliances with secular parties. In Kuwait and Morocco, Islamists abided by the political rules whenever they ran for parliament, even when it meant embracing those countries' monarchies. Morocco's Justice and Development Party recognized the sacred dimension of the king in order to participate in elections, while Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood has publicly supported the king despite growing discontent among the Arab Bedouin tribes.

A generation of Islamic activists forced into exile also played a major role in redirecting their movements. Most leaders or members ended up spending more time in Western countries rather than Islamic nations, where they came into contact with other secular and liberal dissidents as well as non-government organizations (NGOs) such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Freedom House. These new connections facilitated the flow of ideas, and their movements' evolution.

In the 1990s, exiled activists increasingly framed their agendas in terms of democracy and human rights. They acknowledged that simplistic slogans like "Islam is the solution" were not enough to build programs or coalitions capable of removing dictators. Rached Ghannouchi, co-founder of Tunisia's Ennahda Party, concluded almost 20 years before the Arab uprisings that democracy was a better tool to fight dictatorships than the call for either *jihad* or *sharia*.

The Social Revolution

Islamists have changed because society has changed. The rise of Islamists has reflected the social and cultural revolutions within Muslim societies as much as a political revolution.

A new generation has entered the political space, especially in the major cities. It is the generation of Tahrir Square, the epicenter of Egypt's uprising against former President Hosni Mubarak. When the uprisings began, two-thirds of the Arab world's 300 million people were under the age of 30. They are better educated and more connected with the outside world than any previous generation. Many speak or understand a foreign language. The females are often as ambitious as their male counterparts. Both genders eagerly question and debate. Most are able to identify and even shrug off propaganda.

The shift does not necessarily mean the baby-boom generation is more liberal or more secular than their parents. Many Arab baby boomers are attracted by new forms of religiosity that stress individual choice, direct relations with God, self-realization, and self-esteem. But even when they join Islamic movements, they bring along their critical approach and reluctance to blindly follow an aging leadership.

The transformation is visible even among young Egyptian Salafis, followers of a puritanical strain of Islam that emphasizes a return to early Islamic practices. They may wear baggy trousers and long white shirts in imitation of the Prophet Mohammed. But they also often wear shiny sunglasses and sport shoes. They are part of a global culture.

For decades, the Salafis opposed participation in politics. But after the uprisings, they completely reversed course. They jumped into politics, hastily registering as political parties. At universities, clubs of young Salafis — including females — have joined public debate forums.

The influence of the current baby-boom generation will be enduring. Their numbers are likely to dominate for much of their lives — potentially another 30 to 40 years — because the fertility rate has plummeted almost everywhere in the Arab world since their birth.

The Three Camps

During the centuries-old debate about Islam and democracy, Muslim religious scholars and intellectuals fell into three broad camps.

The first camp rejects both democracy and secularism as Western concepts that are not even worth refuting. In this fundamentalist view, participating even in everyday politics, such as joining a political party or voting, is *haram*, or religiously forbidden. This has been the position of the Wahhabi clerics in Saudi Arabia, the Taliban in Afghanistan and, for decades, the various Salafi schools across the Arab world.

The second camp claims that returning to the "true tenets" of Islam will create the best kind of democracy. In this conservative view, the faithful may deliberate to understand the true path, but the idea that religion is the ultimate truth is not negotiable. These Islamists invoke the concept of *tawhid*, or the oneness, uniqueness and sovereignty of God, which can never be replaced by the will of the people.

The second camp also invokes Muslim practices to claim modern political ideology meets the basic requirements of democracy. For example, it often points to the *shura* or advisory council, where ideas were debated before submitting proposals to the leader — as the equivalent of a parliament.

The third camp advocates *ijtihad*, or reinterpreting Islam to make it compatible with the universal concept of democracy. This position is more common among lay intellectuals than among clerics. But the opening up the doors of *ijtihad*, which conservative scholars had believed were closed in the Middle Ages, has already produced its own spectrum of ideas, not all in agreement.

The Islamist reformers often have a larger audience in the West than in their own countries — and not just because of censorship and harassment. Some are deemed to be too intellectual, too abstract, or tied to an artificial theology. Their philosophical approach is disconnected from popular religious practices and the teachings at most *madrasas*, or religious schools.

The Future

The new Islamist brand will increasingly mix technocratic modernism and conservative values. The movements that have entered the political mainstream cannot now afford to turn their backs on multiparty politics for fear of alienating a significant portion of the electorate that wants stability and peace, not revolution.

But in countries undergoing transitions, the Islamists will face a tough balancing act. In Egypt, for example, the Muslim Brotherhood cannot cede its conviction that Islam is all encompassing. Yet it risks losing popular support unless it can also reconcile Islam with good governance and human rights.

To do that, the Muslim Brothers may have to translate Islamic norms into more universal conservative values — such as limiting the sale of alcohol in a manner more similar to Utah's rules than to Saudi laws, and promoting "family values" instead of imposing *sharia* norms on women.

Many Islamist movements still do not share the democratic culture of the uprisings. But given their own demographics and the wider constituency they seek, they will increasingly have to take into account the new political playing field created by the demonstrations — even within their own movements.

The exercise of power can actually have a debilitating effect on ideological parties. And for all their recent political success, Islamists also face a set of constraints: They do not control the armed forces. Their societies are more educated and sophisticated in their worldviews, and more willing to actively express their opinions than in years past. Women are increasingly prominent players, reflected in their growing numbers in universities.

Ironically, elected Islamists may face opposition from the clergy. Among Sunnis, Islamists usually do not control the religious institutions. Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood does not control Al Azhar University, the Islamic world's oldest educational institution dating back more than a millennium. The Brothers may have won a plurality in parliament, but none of them is authorized to say what is or is not Islamic without being challenged by a wide range of other religious actors, from clerics to university scholars.

The biggest constraint on Islamists, however, may be economic realities. Focusing simply on *sharia* will not spawn economic development, and could easily deter foreign investment and tourism. The labor force is outspoken and does not want to be forgotten, but economic globalization requires sensitivity to international pressures too. The newly elected Islamists face political rejection if they do not deliver the economic goods.

Israel is still unpopular and anti-Western xenophobia has visibly grown, but Islamist movements will need more than these old issues to sustain their rise to power. The Arab uprisings have shifted the battle lines in the Middle East, and Islamists will find it harder to play on the Arab-Israeli conflict or tensions with the international community.

At the moment, the most dangerous divide is persistent tensions between Sunnis and Shiites. The differences are symbolized by deepening political fault lines between the Sunni religious monarchy in Saudi Arabia and Iran's Shiite theocracy, but they ripple across the region — from the tiny archipelago of Bahrain to strategically located Syria.

Just as Islamism is redefining the region's politics, Islamic politics and sectarian differences are redefining its conflicts.

Olivier Roy, a professor at the European University Institute in Florence, is the author of Globalized Islam (2004) and Holy Ignorance (2010). He heads the ReligioWest Research project at the European University Institute.

The Illusive Rise of Islamists

By Khalil al-Anani, December 8, 2011

The victory of Islamist parties in Egyptian elections is overrated. Given Islamists' entrenched presence in the Arab societies, politically, economically, and socially, let alone the abundant religious propaganda, it is more striking that thus far none of the Islamists parties have obtained an absolute majority in 2011's post Arab uprising elections. Islamists in Tunis, Morocco, and Egypt cannot claim superiority over other political forces. The seeming triumph of Islamist forces will soon be revealed as an illusion.

In Tunis, the Ennahda Party won only 37 percent of constituent assembly seats (89 out of 217), which placed them ahead of other political parties but did not grant Ennhada the final word in writing the new constitution or in forming a unilateral government. In Morocco, the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) barely won 27 percent in the elections (107 out of 395 of seats) with less than 46 percent voter turnout. True, the PJD received more than double the votes it won in the last elections (the party got 47 seats in 2007 elections), and it is the first time for a party to get this number of seats since the first Moroccan elections in 1963. However, the peculiarity and complexity of the Moroccan electoral system (which creates a fractured parliament) does not guarantee a single party dominance over the legislature. Even in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the iconic and the most potent Islamist movement in the Arab world, received just 36.6 percent of votes in the first round despite its long-standing experience in running election campaigns. (Although the movement had officially been banned for decades, many Brothers ran in elections as "independent" candidates.)

The greater surprise lies in the relative success of the ultraconservative Salafists, the dark horse of the Egyptian elections, who garnered 24.3 percent of the votes. But it is highly unexpected that they will achieve the same proportion in the two upcoming phases of elections. Not only because of their unwise and naïve Islamic rhetoric which has overshadowed the media over the past few weeks, but also because they will confront their more moderate Islamist counterparts, the Muslim Brotherhood and Al-Wasat Party. In the run-off elections between individual candidates this week, the Brotherhood crushed their Salafi rivals, winning nearly ten times as many seats.

One of the major fears associated with the rise of the Islamists is that they will use their power to reshape political institutions in their favor. But in fact, these elections will not change the rules of the game in favor of the newcomers and empower them. Not one of the "rising" Islamist parties will be able to take real power from the incumbent rulers - at least not from their performance at the ballot box.

In Tunis, as well as in Morocco and Egypt, Islamists parties that won the elections will not be able to significantly alter the status quo to their benefit. First, the embedded authoritarian structures are still functioning and the old elite is vibrant. The heavy legacy of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak will impede any attempt by new governments to dismantle these structures. For instance, the Ennahda Party, after forming a coalition government that is still under intensive negotiations, will grapple with two old and entrenched institutions: the army and the security establishment. Both will fight to preclude any fundamental changes that might affect their interests. The Tunisian army showed a remarkable degree of self-restraint from grabbing power after Ben Ali fled; however, its generals are not angels. They view the army as "the guardian of the republic" which might hint to an oversight if not a soft patronage role particularly if civilians could not tame their roles in the new constitution. They will attentively monitor the political scene from behind the curtain. It is much worse with the security forces, which will not bow to the new realities easily. Any

attempt to rehabilitate them to fit into the new democratic settings might undermine the whole process of transition.

In Morocco, the monarch is sovereign, untouchable and operates above politics. The constitutional amendments that were approved last July in a celebrated referendum do not confer much power to the parliament. They reorganized the political domain to become more visible, yet ineffective. The PJD will form a weak government that will seek to appease the monarchy and the street at the same time. Not surprisingly, the PJD is not positioning itself as a contender to the palace (al-Makhzan), which retains the full power over the state and society.

In Egypt, it is even more blatant. The military is the only player in town and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) appears unlikely to cede power to the Muslim Brotherhood or any other political party. The new parliament, which will likely be led by Islamists, will therefore be ineffective and constrained. According to a constitutional declaration approved by a popular referendum last March, the SCAF has the exclusive power to assign and dismiss the government. In a recent message sent through SCAF General Mamdouh Shaeen, legal assistant to the defense minister, the leading parties in the elections will not be able to form the government, dissolve the SCAF's appointed government, or question its ministers. More ironically, the parliament will not have the authority to craft the new constitution without the SCAF's oversight.

Therefore, the mere outcome of the on-going elections will merely add to the fragmented and divisive political scene.

None of the Islamist parties will form a unilateral government. They will have to bargain, build coalitions, and make concessions. By doing so, Islamists will have to rein in their political ambitions and show elasticity in sharing power. More significantly, as a part of transition dynamics, Islamists are more prone to abandon their original goals, such as building an Islamic state and applying the Islamic law (sharia). The recent statements of Islamists leaders in Tunis, Morocco, and Egypt show a tendency toward re-prioritizing their agenda to become more pragmatic and realistic. Instead of focusing on the sacred and identity issues, they have been inclined to address more mundane and practical problems including reforming education, fighting corruption, and rebuilding infrastructure.

With the ethos of the Arab Spring still thriving, the young Arabs will not tolerate any violation of personal freedoms and human rights. The new "Islamist" governments will be required not only to give assurances of respecting political pluralism, minorities' rights, freedom of speech, and so forth, but more importantly will need to provide genuine concessions pertaining to their Islamic pursuits. In other words, the pressure on Islamists will not be confined to their political positions, whereby they can shrewdly maneuver against their adversaries, but more importantly will affect their ideological convictions, which will subvert their "illusive" rise.

Khalil al-Anani is a Scholar at the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University, UK and a former visiting fellow at the Brookings Institute. He can be reached at k.m.ibrahim@durham.ac.uk.

Ready for their close-up

By James Traub, December 2, 2011

The great experiment has begun. Arab publics went to the polls in Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt, and to no one's surprise, Islamist parties came out on top in each case. Does this mean that Islamists have "hijacked" the revolution? Or that the Arab Spring will become, as Newt Gingrich put it in the Republicans' foreign-policy debate, an "anti-Christian spring?" The one-word answer is "no." The three-word answer is "I hope not."

Tunisia's Ennahda party, Morocco's Justice and Development Party, and Egypt's Freedom and Justice Party (the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood) are not secular, but they are democratic — or at the very least, they have earned the right to have their democratic bona fides tested in the real world of political practice. They won pluralities because they were the best-organized parties in each country, but also because in the years before the populist upheaval they had come to be seen as forces for social justice in the face of autocratic rule.

They've earned their place, but what now? The most pressing question is not about their intentions, pious or otherwise, but about whether they will be permitted to rule at all. In Tunisia, where there is no entrenched rival force, the answer is almost certainly yes. In Morocco, King Mohammed VI promulgated a new constitution to give some authority to the feeble parliament, but he kept virtually all real power for himself. The November 2011 election aroused nothing like the enthusiasm of Tunisia's or Egypt's, with turnout a relatively modest 45 percent and large numbers of voters turning in intentionally spoiled ballots. In Egypt, of course, the interim military government, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), said it plans to rule until a president is elected, apparently in mid-2012; but Egyptians are increasingly worried that the SCAF will not withdraw even then.

Still, elections have a way of changing the landscape. Morocco's Justice and Development Party (PJD by its French initials), through which the country's Islamists are organized, has already gently pushed back against the palace by asserting that if the king did not choose the party's leader, Abdelilah Benkirane, as prime minister, they would reserve the right to review, and reject, his choice. (The king chose Benkirane.) Ahmed Benchemsi, a Moroccan journalist now at Stanford University and very much a secularist, says, "No other party leader would ever have dared say such a thing." For the first time, he says, "the balance of power is being challenged." The Brotherhood in Egypt has challenged the SCAF by calling for a "cabinet of national salvation," which the group would lead. That won't happen; but the gauntlet has, ever so carefully, been thrown down.

For this reason, some of the secular figures who led the revolution in Tahrir Square reacted calmly to the Brotherhood's showing. On a talk show, Wael Ghonim, the Egyptian Google executive who was a pivotal figure in last year's revolution, was quoted as saying, "It makes no difference to me whether Egypt is a civil or religious state so long as it is correctly run politically and economically." Many others, of course, fear that a Brotherhood-dominated parliament will lead Egypt deeper into obscurantism.

The big decision for the Brotherhood will be with whom to align. The real surprise of the ballot was that the hard-liner Salafis took about a quarter of the vote, far outpacing both the traditional liberals who have long operated in the shadows of the military state and the more radical forces associated with Tahrir Square. The Brotherhood is a worldly force accustomed to political maneuver and compromise; the Salafis are genuine theocrats. The Salafis would probably demand clauses in the constitution limiting the rights of women or non-Muslims and would try to legislate morality, which Brotherhood parliamentarians have avoided seeking to do in the past. A Brotherhood-Salafi alliance would draw a line right through Egyptian society and might well turn Tahrir Square into a cockpit of secular-Islamist confrontation.

Will the Brotherhood turn that way? The *New York Times*' account of the electoral outcome largely accepted that view. And it's true that the Islamists can now dispense with liberal forces if they want to. On the other hand, Saad el-Katatni, the party secretary general, explicitly rejected an alliance with al-Nour, the main Salafi group. Marina Ottaway, an Egypt expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, pointed out that during the campaign season, the Freedom and Justice Party tried to build an alliance with secular forces — which ultimately formed a compact of their own — and refused to join an Islamist alliance. "If I had to take a bet about that right now," Ottaway said, "I would bet they would form an alliance with the more secular parties and the more moderate elements."

Joshua Stacher, an academic at Kent State University who has studied the inner workings of the Brothers, views them less as an Islamic body than as a giant jobs program. Stacher doesn't think the Brotherhood will provoke a civil war with secular forces, but he also doesn't think they will stand up to the generals who replaced President Hosni Mubarak. The Brotherhood is no longer an opposition party, Stacher noted, "they're part of the political elite."

What is certainly true is that the prospect of finally gaining power has turned the Brothers into allies of Egypt's military rulers. While other forces stood up against the SCAF's brutality and called for a postponement of elections, the Brotherhood held its tongue and stayed off the street. In a speech give by Mohammed Badie, the leader of the Brotherhood, known as the supreme guide, lamely explained that his members had declined to join the mass demonstrations — which led to the deaths of at least 40 protesters — out of fear of a "conspiracy" seeking "to lure the Brotherhood to the square" and then incite violence. Badie blamed the bloodshed on the ubiquitous "hidden hands" — Israel, the United States, the CIA — rather than security forces acting on behalf of the military.

On balance the Brotherhood might be less inclined to forge an alliance with the Salafis than it will be to serve as a facade and a prop for the military. (The same may be true of the PJD in Morocco, though it would be providing window dressing for the palace rather than the generals.) That would indeed amount to hijacking the revolution. But this is what democracy is for. Should the Brotherhood become an Islamist-accented version of Mubarak's old National Democratic Party, the Egyptian public won't stand for it. The Islamists could win one election, but lose the next. Of course there's the fear that they simply wouldn't stage another election. But the Brotherhood's own members wouldn't stand for that. "The era of 'one man, one vote, one time' is over," says Stacher.

Meanwhile, U.S. President Barack Obama's administration has been reaching out to the Brotherhood. In November 2011, two midlevel State Department officials went to the organization's headquarters to meet with Essam el-Erian, a senior Brotherhood leader and the party's vice chairman. With the Islamist victory, Obama may be tempted to pull back and perhaps even reduce the pressure on the SCAF to hand over power to a civilian government. The United States has, after all, been doing business with military rulers in Egypt for 60 years. But that era, too, is over. Whatever threat the Islamists pose, to Egypt or to the West, pales before the threat of further clumsy and brutal military rule.

James Traub is a contributing writer for the New York Times Magazine and a fellow of the Center on International Cooperation. "Terms of Engagement," his column for ForeignPolicy.com, runs weekly.

The irrelevance of the International Muslim Brotherhood

By Nathan Brown, September 20, 2010

A while after the election of Muhammad Badi' as "general guide" of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the international Brotherhood organization — a contentious and unusually public process — I shared a lunch with some leaders of a Brotherhood-inspired movement in another Arab state. The conversation was mostly in English, but sometimes turned to Arabic (particularly when the Brotherhood leaders were speaking to each other). One of them asked me in English, "Nathan, what do you think of what is going on in the Brotherhood in Egypt?" Before I could reply, another leader asked my questioner in Arabic "Who is the new general guide?" Neither of them could remember so I piped in with Badi"s name. Neither one noticed me at first, so I repeated it. At that point, one of them replied vaguely to the other, "Yes, I think it is Muhammad something."

How disciplined and well-organized can an international organization be when followers struggle to recall their supreme leader's name? In press interviews, personal meetings, and material designed for their own members, Muslim Brotherhood leaders in various Arab countries refer very respectfully to the Brotherhood way of doing things but almost never to the authority or even existence of the international organization. Yet increasingly, awareness of Islamist movements in the West has lead to some dark talk of an international Brotherhood that serves as a cover for all sorts of missionary, political, and even violent activity. From a solid core in the Arab world, the Brotherhood's tentacles are said to be reaching out from Oslo to Oklahoma City.

I have conducted little research on the Brotherhood in Europe and the United States, but I have studied it in various Arab countries where the movement is the strongest and most active. Is there such a thing as an international Muslim Brotherhood uniting these branches? Yes. But the odd truth is that the international Brotherhood does not matter much. And perhaps the odder truth is that it does not seem to matter that the international Muslim Brotherhood does not matter.

There is an international Muslim Brotherhood. Chapters of the Muslim Brotherhood exist in a number of societies; each one of them is headed by a "general supervisor." Most chapters are members of an international body; they also accept the overall leadership of the "general guide," a figure who has almost always doubled as the leader of the Egyptian organization (the original branch, often referred to in other countries as "the mother movement"). The international organization is rather bashful: we know little about its internal operations; we learn about its meetings and actions only when it takes a public decision.

There are a few movements that are clearly inspired by the Brotherhood (in Israel, Kuwait, Iraq, and Indonesia, for instance) that do not acknowledge an open association with the international movement; some have formal ties that are not openly acknowledged and

all have informal ties. And there are other organizations besides the international Brotherhood — such as the International Forum for Islamist Parliamentarians — that are informally associated with the Brotherhood and work to gather members from Brotherhood chapters and Brotherhood-type movements in various countries.

Why does this international organization not matter? Because it has not (and probably cannot) do very much. First, it is sluggish and unresponsive. On the few occasions it has been called in to settle difficult organizational questions, it has not responded with efficiency or alacrity. For instance, in 1989 a dispute among Jordanian Brotherhood members about whether to accept an invitation to join the cabinet proved so contentious the disputants tried to kick the question upstairs to the international organization. The answer came far too late and contained too much ambiguity to resolve the issue. In 2007, Khaled Mishaal sought to have Hamas recognized as a distinct member of the international organization, setting off a complex organizational tussle inside the Jordanian organization. (Hamas has largely subsumed the Palestinian Brotherhood, which in turn was formally attached in the eyes of the international organization to the Jordanian branch — and some vestigial links survive between Hamas and the Jordanian Brotherhood as a result). One chief bone of contention focused on what would happen to Palestinian and Jordanian members in the Gulf (an important source of funds but also a group that sent representatives to the leadership bodies of the Jordanian organization, tilting it in a Palestinian direction). Three years later, the issues were still not fully resolved.

Second, the international organization is not only sluggish, it is also Egyptian dominated. Its leader is always an Egyptian and Egyptian Brotherhood members have scoffed at the idea that a non-Egyptian might be selected. Badi"s election was approved by the international organization, but there was some grumbling about the rubber-stamp nature of the process. Most members do accept that the "mother organization" will inevitably have a leading role, but many also find the Egyptian leaders far more interested in Egyptian than international affairs. Egypt's harsh security climate also hampers its leaders from becoming more active internationally — many Egyptian leaders cannot travel outside their country.

Finally, various chapters of the Muslim Brotherhood have developed an ethos of mutual deference: they increasingly hold fast to the idea that each chapter should be free to react as it sees fit to local conditions. The various chapters do consult each other, but they are free to reject the advice they receive. The Iraqi Islamic Party participated in a political process sponsored by the United States at a time when Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood refused contact with American officials because of the country's occupation of Iraq. Aware of the conflicting stances, leaders of both organizations simply agreed to disagree. Hamas was advised by both Jordanian and Egyptian leaders not to try too hard in the 2006 parliamentary elections. "Participation, not domination" (that is, run but do not win) was the formula suggested to them. They listened to the first half of the message (they ran), but not the second (they won). Unlike their Jordanian and Egyptian comrades who only contest a minority of seats, they submitted a complete slate of candidates for parliamentary seats, enabling their surprising (and in the eyes of some Brotherhood leaders elsewhere) ill-advised victory.

Mutual deference extends quite far: all Brotherhood movements agree on the general principle that they will work only for peaceful change. The exception is that violent resistance to occupation is legitimate. When is a country occupied and when should resistance be used in such a case? That is for each branch to evaluate. Hamas has universal support for its violent "resistance" but Brotherhood members also make clear that it is up to Hamas to decide when and how to employ violence.

But doesn't the international organization seek to recreate a global Islamic caliphate? Well, there are certainly some older ideological documents suggesting such a distant goal but there is precious little evidence that the matter weighs much on the minds of current leaders, focused as they are on their domestic scenes. If the international organization was the germ of a recreated unified Islamic world, membership might be a bit more portable than it currently is. For instance, a member of a Palestinian branch temporarily residing in the Gulf might be treated in the Gulf state as a member of the local organization. That sort of inter-branch linkage often did happen earlier in the Brotherhood's history but has declined significantly in recent years. Brotherhood branches offer each other moral (and in a few cases material) support, but membership in a national organization is hardly treated as membership in a single, international movement.

So the international organization exists but does not matter much. But here is where we come finally to the more profound irrelevance: it may not matter much that the international organization does not matter much.

Brotherhood-type movements — whether formally affiliated or not, whether nominally accepting of the leadership of the Egyptian general guide or completely independent — still show two characteristics that make formal coordination seem unnecessary, even counterproductive.

First, the various branches have no problem trying to follow a common general model —but that is because the model is so general it can be applied very differently in different settings. Members almost never refer to the authority of the international organization or the current general guide, but they regular refer to the Brotherhood's model (*manhaj*) and to the thought of Hassan al-Banna. Al-Banna's thought in turn, is hardly an abstract philosophy but instead a set of organizational techniques, inspirational speeches, and a general approach that places a tremendous emphasis on social engagement. Brotherhood members and their movements are supposed to work on behalf of reform on all levels — personal, social, political, and religious. They are not to form an isolated community of saints but to build better selves, families, and communities based on Islamic teachings. This model is flexible but pushes the Brotherhood outwards. It inspires branches and members to enter politics and run for office, form charitable associations, speak softly to non-members, act as role models in their neighborhoods, embark on self-improvement, participate in study groups, and support Islamic causes. Given the broad range of activities Brotherhood branches are involved in — and given that some of this activity does not take place under the Brotherhood rubric — it is often difficult to discern where a Brotherhood's formal organizational reach begins and ends. Brotherhood members are often involved in a host of projects, hospitals, schools, clubs, and associations, but it is not always clear how closely those other organizations are associated with the Brotherhood movement. It is this organizational feature that is both a secret of the Brotherhood's influence and a source of the suspicions and confusion that surround the movement.

The second reason for the limited relevance of the formal international organization is that Brotherhood members recognize each other without it. It may be difficult to tell where each Brotherhood branch organization begins and ends, but it is generally clear to

people in the movement who is following the general model and who is not. Ask an Egyptian Brotherhood leader who represents the Brotherhood movement in Kuwait and one will get a clear answer (even though the Kuwaiti movement cut its formal ties with the international two decades ago).

At a global level, the Brotherhood is no mafia. Nor is it a rigid and disciplined Stalinist-style Comintern. It most closely resembles today's Socialist International: a tame framework for a group of loosely linked, ideologically similar movements that recognize each other, swap stories and experiences in occasional meetings, and happily subscribe to a formally international ideology without giving it much priority. There is every reason to be interested in the Brotherhood's myriad (and surprisingly diverse) country branches, but there is no reason to fear it as a menacing global web.

Nathan Brown is a professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University, a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and a 2009 Carnegie Scholar for the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Is the Arab Spring bad for women?

By Isobel Coleman, December 20, 2011

In many ways, 2011 was the Year of the Arab Woman. From the earliest days of upheaval that started in Tunisia in December 2010, women have been on the front lines of protest, leading public demonstrations, blogging passionately, covering the unrest as journalists, launching social media campaigns, smuggling munitions, and caring for the wounded. In December 2011, when Tawakkol Karman became the first Arab woman to accept the Nobel Peace Prize, she gave an enthusiastic shout-out to her many Arab sisters who have struggled "to win their rights in a society dominated by the supremacy of men."

Across the region, though, Arab women are grumbling that overthrowing dictators is proving easier than overturning the pervasive supremacy of men. Gamila Ismail, a prominent Egyptian activist and politician, summed it up when she quit Egypt's parliamentary race in disgust after learning that she would be put third on the list in her district — not a winning position. "We women had a very important role before, during, and after the revolution, and it does not work for us today, to accept this," she complained in a television interview. (She ran and narrowly lost as an independent candidate.) In Tunisia, disgruntled women activists formed the October 24 Front to defend women's rights in the aftermath of the Islamists' electoral victory there. "We want a constitution that respects women's rights and doesn't roll back the advances we've made," said one Tunisian protester.

Arab women are embattled on multiple fronts. First and foremost are the deep-seated patriarchal customs that constrain women. Patriarchy is certainly not unique to Arab lands, but it runs deep. It doesn't help that for decades, the women's rights agenda was closely associated with the now-discredited authoritarian regimes: Egypt's Suzanne Mubarak ran a state-affiliated women's non-governmental organization (NGO); Leila Ben Ali, Tunisia's much-hated hairdresser-cum-first lady, was president of the Arab Women Organization, an intergovernmental body sponsored by the Arab League; and both Syria's Asma al-Assad and Jordan's Queen Rania have been active on women's issues. The rise of politically empowered Islamist parties that contest existing laws for women on religious grounds also pose serious complications for women. Although women's activism has clearly been important to the Arab revolts, there is no guarantee that women's rights activists will be able to turn their engagement into longer-term economic, social, and political gains. In fact, in some countries, there is reason for concern that women will see their rights erode.

Libya is a case in point. At the ceremony marking Libya's official liberation in October, one of the first announcements from Mustafa Abdel Jalil, leader of Libya's National Transitional Council, was that any laws that contradicted sharia would be annulled. He specifically mentioned that polygamy would be legal, drawing cheers and celebratory gunfire from the mostly male crowd. Libyan women expressed surprise and disappointment and wondered why, with all of Libya's pressing issues, reinstating polygamy should be on the front burner. (NATO leaders wondered the same.) Although polygamy was technically legal under Muammar al-Qaddafi, it was discouraged and today is not practiced widely in Libya, but that could change. Female university students, who largely describe themselves as pious, vow to fight this regression.

In Egypt, a number of developments over the past year underscore women's rights as a flashpoint in society. The inspirational images of gender solidarity in Tahrir Square in the early days of the revolution quickly gave way to ugly episodes of targeted harassment. A hastily planned demonstration on March 8, 2011, International Women's Day, attracted a few hundred women but was marred by angry men shoving the protesters and yelling at them to go home, saying their demands for rights are against Islam. Around the same time, the Egyptian military rounded up scores of women demonstrators and, in a show of raw intimidation, subjected many of them to "virginity tests." On the political level, women have been excluded from major decision-making bodies since the fall of Hosni Mubarak's regime, and few won seats in the parliamentary elections. Their low success rate was not helped by the military's decision to eliminate a Mubarak-era quota ensuring women 64 seats. This was a setback for women's political participation, even though the quota enjoyed little credibility because it had been used to reward Mubarak loyalists.

The ultraconservative Salafi groups, who openly question a modern role for women in society, have many women worried. One Salafi leader refused to appear on a political talk show on television until the female host put on a headscarf. Another denounced the military government's requirement to include women on electoral lists as "evil," though Emad Abdel-Ghafour, head of al-Nour, the leading Salafi party, stated that the party does accept women candidates. Yet the Salafi women who did run demurred from showing

their pictures on campaign materials, instead replacing their faces with pictures of flowers; moreover, the party deliberately clustered them at the bottom of its lists, making them unlikely to win seats. One Salafi sheikh issued an opinion that women should not wear high-heeled shoes in public. Along with Salafi statements of intent to ban alcohol and limit beach tourism, these swipes at women unnerve liberals.

Yet liberals have not been stalwarts of women's rights in Egypt either. The 2000 decision to grant women the right to no-fault divorce (prior to this, they had to jump over the onerous legal hurdle of proving abuse or abandonment) was denounced not only by Islamist groups but by secular ones too — for undermining the family. Other changes to the personal-status laws in the past decade that have benefited women, particularly an expansion of custody rights, are coming under increasing attack. Critics discredit the reforms by derisively calling them "Suzanne's Laws," after Suzanne Mubarak. They claim the laws were intended to accommodate the wealthy friends of the former first lady, and they blame those statutes for a rise in the country's divorce rate. Given the criticism of these laws from all sides of the political spectrum, it is likely that they will be amended by the new parliament, and not to women's benefit.

Women seem to be faring better in Tunisia. Liberals and secularists have been deeply wary of the rise of Ennahda, the country's leading Islamist party, warning that it could mean a reversal of women's rights. Since the 1950s, Tunisian women have enjoyed the most expansive legal rights in the region, including relatively progressive marriage and divorce laws and access to birth control and abortion. Since returning to Tunisia in the beginning of 2011, Rached Ghannouchi, Ennahda's leader, has strived to convince Tunisians that his party will not seek to change the country's personal-status laws. Some, however, have accused Ennahda of obfuscating its real intentions behind moderate rhetoric — a charge that did not prevent the party from surging to victory with 41 percent of the vote in the October 2011 election. Thanks to electoral rules requiring favorable placement of women on party lists, women gained 23 percent of the seats in parliament, a higher share than in the U.S. Congress. Most of the women are from Ennahda and will likely reflect their party's traditional views on women, but their participation in such large numbers at least normalizes an active political role for women. Moreover, Ghannouchi and other Ennahda leaders so far have been purposefully focused on efforts to jump-start the economy, produce jobs, and reassure foreign investors. Ennahda has forged a coalition with liberal parties, and to maintain that coalition, it will have to continue to focus on the economy and human rights rather than getting bogged down in divisive culture wars.

Ghannouchi seems to understand that while rolling back gains for women can score points among Islamic conservatives, ultimately al-Nahda will win or lose on economic grounds, and women are important economic actors. With high rates of literacy and relatively low fertility, women constitute nearly one third of Tunisia's workforce. Economic reality simply demands a pragmatic approach toward women. Let's hope that Ghannouchi can get that message through to his Islamist brothers across the region. Otherwise, Arab women might soon be channeling their Iranian sisters, who have complained that Iran's Islamic Revolution has brought them little but poverty and polygamy.

Isobel Coleman is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and author of Paradise Beneath Her Feet: How Women Are Transforming the Middle East.

Chapter 2

AL-QAEDA

Bin Laden's Quiet End

By Marc Lynch, May 2, 2011

So Osama bin Laden was finally killed. This represents the achievement of a goal long sought by virtually all Americans and most of the world, and is a cathartic moment capturing the attention of the world. As most counter-terrorism experts (and administration officials) have been quick to point out, his death will not end al Qaeda. It does matter, though. There could be some major operational impact on the relative balance among al Qaeda Central, the decentralized ideological Salafi-jihadist movement, and the regional AQ franchises. But I will leave those crucial issues to others for now in order to focus on the impact of his death on Arab politics and on the broader milieu of Islamism.

The fact is al Qaeda had *already* been effectively marginalized within the mainstream of the Arab world long before bin Laden died. His death removed the only al Qaeda figure still able to speak effectively to that Arab mainstream, and marked the end of an era of Arab politics which had already largely faded away. Al Qaeda's marginalization in Arab politics had been developing for a long time, and was only further advanced by bin Laden's death. How this happened, and how it matters for the rapidly evolving Arab world, are the questions which now need attention.

Al Qaeda was never able to attract significant support for its Salafi-jihadist ideology, and thrived with mass Arab audiences only when it was able to pose as an avatar of resistance to the West. Al Qaeda thrived on the "clash of civilizations" and "war of ideas" rhetoric which dominated the first five years of the administration of George W. Bush, since this vindicated its claim to speak on behalf of Islam against the West. But the Bush administration's switch in its final two years toward a more nuanced approach focused on highlighting al Qaeda's extremism and marginality proved more effective. The Obama administration continued this approach, and built on it by explicitly reducing its rhetorical focus on al Qaeda and pushing back against all attempts to reignite a "clash of civilizations" narrative. That, combined with continuing aggressive counter-terrorism efforts, weakened and marginalized al Qaeda long before they finally got bin Laden.

The decline in al Qaeda's fortunes was also driven by trends inside of Arab politics. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's brutality in Iraq and the wave of terrorist attacks inside Arab and Muslim countries drove a serious backlash. Arab governments began to take al Qaeda more seriously, with the Saudis, Jordanians, and many others launching major campaigns at home and across the region after suffering terrorist attacks at home. The message that al Qaeda killed innocent Muslims, reinforced and amplified by American strategic communications and by sympathetic Arab governments and media, took a serious toll. So did al Qaeda's repeated picking of losing fights with more popular Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and Hezbollah. In short, while it was able to appeal to and recruit from the small, extreme sub-cultures which developed around jihadist ideology, al Qaeda has long since lost its attractiveness to mainstream Arabs.

Bin Laden was the only al Qaeda figure able to command the attention of a mainstream Arab audience despite these setbacks. He remained uniquely charismatic and able to frame al Qaeda's narrative in ways which resonated with a broader Arab and Muslim audience. His infrequent tapes would still dominate the Arab news cycle. None of his possible successors have demonstrated such an ability. Ayman al-Zawahiri routinely issues tapes, but his pedantic lectures rarely gain any traction outside of jihadist quarters. Some of the "rising stars" such as Abu Yahya al-Libi speak effectively to the radicalized jihadist base, but are somewhere between unknown and incomprehensible to a mainstream audience. I haven't seen much evidence that Anwar al-Awlaqi (even before his death at the hands of an American strike) has any real presence with Arabic speaking audiences. To the extent that al Qaeda's strategy requires reaching out to a broader Arabic speaking public, bin Laden's death represented a major blow.

The Muslim Brotherhood rapidly seized the opportunity to repeat its frequent condemnations of bin Laden and terrorism. This should surprise no one who has been paying attention. The Muslim Brotherhood and al Qaeda have long been fierce rivals, competing with each other to define Islamist identity, doctrine, politics, and strategy (for a detailed discussion of this conflict, see Islam Divided Between Salafi-Jihad and the Ikhwan). The Brotherhood used the opportunity to emphasize their differences with al Qaeda, to condemn terrorism and violence, to defend legitimate resistance to occupation, and to denounce all efforts to equate Islam with terrorism. It will probably try to use this distancing in its election campaign in Egypt and elsewhere, and try to reassure the West and its domestic opponents about its participation. Ismail Haniya of Hamas, by contrast, denounced the killing of bin Laden, demonstrating the real differences among the various organizations within the Muslim Brotherhood milieu (and potentially differences inside of Hamas — something to follow closely in the coming days).

Bin Laden's death only temporarily distracted the Arab media's attention from the 2011 uprisings which dominated regional politics. Al Qaeda has been almost completely irrelevant to those upheavals, as has been widely noted, and has struggled to find an opening into movements based on fundamentally different principles. It is ironic that their leader's death has been the first time that al Qaeda

has broken into Al Jazeera's news cycle since the Arab uprisings began. It will soon fade, and Arab attention will return to Syria, Libya, and the rest of the regional transformations.

This does not mean, however, that al Qaeda is forever irrelevant, as some would hope. The horrible bombing in Morocco on April 28, 2011 should be enough to disabuse anyone of such ideas. The small but dangerous Salafi-jihadist base has always been outside of political currents in the region, and will continue to seek opportunities to act when appropriate. Indeed, if the revolutions fail, economies don't improve, and elections produce unattractive political leadership, it is easy enough to imagine frustrated youth a few years from now again finding al Qaeda's message attractive.

Bin Laden's death marks a symbolic point of closure to an historical period that had already faded from view. Al Qaeda as an organization and ideology will likely adapt and survive, the threat will mutate, and Islamist politics will evolve. It offers another opportunity for the United States to move on from the problems of the past and to establish the new relationship with the people of the Arab world which it so desperately needs. It doesn't change everything, but it does matter. Beyond that, we will just have to wait and see.

Marc Lynch is associate professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University where he is the director of the Institute of Middle East Studies and Project on Middle East Political Science. Follow him @abuaardvark.

Al Qaeda on the Ropes

By Brian Fishman and Phil Mudd, February 23, 2012

On February 10, 2012, the emir of al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, officially accepted Somalia's al-Shabab movement's pledge of allegiance. In a video statement, Zawahiri crowed that such displays indicate that, "the jihadi movement is growing with God's help." This may have been true just before and after the 9/11 attacks, when "homegrown" jihadi extremists in Western countries and regional affiliates valued the al Qaeda brand. But today, al Qaeda's core organization in Pakistan is battered, the effort to spur homegrown jihadists in the West has faltered, and its regional affiliates are more often losing ground than gaining it.

Public displays of unity don't change the reality that — more than a decade after their greatest triumph — al Qaeda's central leadership and its affiliates are generally in decline.

After 9/11, al Qaeda's model seemed destined to spread. The plan was to support and inspire affiliate organizations, from the Philippines through Indonesia and into South Asia, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, and Africa. The central leadership would organize major attacks and develop propaganda while al Qaeda's web of regional partners traded their local reach for the use of a global brand that helped attract recruits, financial donors, and attention.

Affiliates from Indonesia to Iraq seemed to gain ground, spreading al Qaeda's ideology to reject Western cultural and political influence among local governments and conducting major attacks that showed their relevance. At least five close allies or co-branded al Qaeda affiliates conducted a major operation during the mid-2000s: Jemaah Islamiyah in Bali and Jakarta, al Qaeda's followers in Riyadh in 2003 and afterward, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and other foreign fighters in Iraq, and groups in Algeria and Yemen against targets from oil facilities to U.N. offices. And new battlegrounds showed promise: Al-Shabab surged into Mogadishu, and the Pakistani Taliban threatened Pakistan's government.

Al Qaeda's expansion was particularly worrisome in regions where extremists could play on deep Islamist roots within the population. Indonesia, with a long history of Islamist politics, harbored the best-organized group beyond core al Qaeda. The string of attacks in Saudi Arabia looked like it might represent growing extremism among the conservative population of the Arabian Peninsula. Jihadists gathered in Iraq, which they considered this generation's Afghanistan, igniting sectarian tensions and briefly threatening to dominate swaths of western Iraq.

Yet a decade later, the strategy is faltering in almost every arena. Some affiliates remain focused on local agendas; others have been crippled by their own mistakes and operational successes against them. Two legs of al Qaeda's three-legged stool, the core group in Pakistan-Afghanistan and the affiliates, are weak. The third leg, so-called homegrown jihadists, has not shown the capability to pose more than a modest threat. Al Qaeda's allies are lethal and broadly dispersed, but they show little sign of producing the global revolution they espouse.

So what happened?

Al Qaeda was partially a victim of its own violent success. Political overreach and excessive violence undercut its claim to be a protector of Islam in the face of Western imperialism. Those failures have proved debilitating during the Arab Spring, when al Qaeda has been a sideshow to tech-savvy young people and more mainstream Islamist groups. Al Qaeda's schizophrenic reaction to the revolt in Libya — backing the popular movement against Muammar al-Qaddafi but warning against the Western support for the uprising that helped the opposition succeed — is symptomatic of a leadership that wants to stay relevant but has little street appeal. Al Qaeda's contortions reflect its desire to remain relevant in a dynamic news cycle by embracing wide-ranging affiliates, an approach that carries risk because many potential affiliates have little operational capability.

Another problem for al Qaeda is that its brand is now closely identified with controversial suicide attacks that kill Muslims. Al Qaeda's senior leaders are aware of that danger. Just after 9/11, al Qaeda's leadership hesitated to embrace North African militants, even as those fighters talked openly of their transition from a local revolutionary group to one with al Qaeda-like goals. The leaders remembered the backlash against violent and doctrinaire jihadi movements, especially the murder of tens of thousands of Muslims in Algeria during the 1990s. Zawahiri saw firsthand the unintended consequences of excessive violence undermining jihadi movements in Egypt in the 1990s, and he tried to steer al Qaeda's Iraqi affiliate away from publicly reveling in its violence against Iraqis.

Counterterrorism successes have played a role as well in weakening al Qaeda. The decapitation of leadership across al Qaeda affiliates has limited these groups' ability to plot major attacks and has undermined the resonance of al Qaeda's message when prominent communicators are either captured or killed. Such activities have spurred popular backlash in some arenas, but they have no doubt had a major impact on the al Qaeda organization itself. Sometimes killing leadership has redirected the strategic focus of affiliates. From Marwan in the southern Philippines through Hambali, Dulmatin, and Abu Bakar Bashir in Indonesia, to Zarqawi in Iraq, Abdel Aziz al-Muqrin in Saudi Arabia, and Anwar al-Awlaqi in Yemen, the elimination of leadership figures has moved the focus of jihadi affiliates toward local concerns rather than the United States.

As a result, some affiliates have abandoned the al Qaeda moniker, both to avoid attention from the United States and due to the weakening of the al Qaeda brand. Al Qaeda's Iraqi affiliate abandoned the label in 2006 and now operates as the Islamic State of Iraq. And the Yemeni Ansar al-Sharia, which has seized swaths of territory near the southern port of Aden, seems to have a relationship with al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), but has avoided taking the al Qaeda name. Jihadi groups with the most expansive local agenda seem to avoid the al Qaeda brand.

Another problem is that al Qaeda's affiliates tend to "think global" when they are losing the ability to "act local." There is dissonance between al Qaeda's effort to build a global brand and its ability to project power in regional settings. Al-Shabab is a good example. Pushed out of Mogadishu and battered by the international community and tribal forces in Somalia, the group is less capable of projecting power in Somalia today than it was three years ago. Even reports of the group's recruitment of Westerners over the past

half-decade, many of which came from the Somali-American community around Minneapolis, have declined amid a renewed push against extremism. Al-Shabab's decision to swear allegiance to al Qaeda comes at a moment of weakness, not strength.

One measure of al Qaeda's decreased brand is the attention it gets in international media. After 9/11, the international community pilloried Al Jazeera, the pan-Arab satellite channel, for showing al Qaeda propaganda videos at length. Today, though such propaganda is available online, the reach of such material is an order of magnitude smaller. Al Jazeera is no longer seen as too close to jihadists, but rather as a critical media outlet that has contributed some of the most daring and powerful coverage of the Arab uprisings. The impact is that voices like Zawahiri's are largely unheard outside already friendly circles.

These successes come not just from Western powers but from political leaders across the globe who confronted al Qaeda, even when doing so required serious political courage. Operations in the southern Philippines, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Algeria have limited the affiliates' ability to build the sort of networks Jemaah Islamiyah used to devastating effect a decade ago. Consistent U.S. intelligence and military assistance to these countries has been vital, from sharing technical information that helped local units track terrorists to military backing for strikes in isolated areas, such as the Philippines' archipelago.

None of this is to say that al Qaeda is dead. Jihadists in Iraq are aggressively eyeing Syria, where sectarian dynamics and escalating violence offer the group an opportunity to project influence. Besides the still-dangerous al-Shabab in Somalia, al Qaeda's Yemeni affiliate has proved resilient and forceful locally, and the allied group Ansar al-Sharia has proved its ability to take and hold territory amid the country's political unrest.

It's important to remember, though, that the fight against al Qaeda was begun not to prevent jihadists from exerting power in Yemeni political squabbles, but to limit attacks on the United States and the West. That's why the elimination of Awlaqi was significant: not because he was the leader of AQAP — he wasn't — but because as an American, he was uniquely positioned to threaten the United

States. Effective counterterrorism policy must be efficient to be sustainable. That means killing or detaining individuals that offer al Qaeda unique capabilities to threaten the United States; it also means being willing to call al Qaeda's bluff by responding with resolute subtlety to empty provocations.

Al Qaeda's leaders brag that they only have to plant their black flag in a far-flung corner of the globe in order to provoke a massive, and potentially counterproductive, American response. Ten years after 9/11, we should not hesitate to attack real threats, but must be tenacious enough to carefully ensure that we are reacting to a persistent threat, not the empty fluttering of an al Qaeda that intends to provoke us into hurting ourselves.

Al Qaeda is down, but not out. The group's ideology is now global, and a small but serious rash of homegrown arrests underscores the persistence of this message over the course of years. Carefully calibrated and quietly delivered counterterrorism support — training, money, technology, even military backing — to regions that face an ongoing threat, from Africa's Sahel to the southern Philippines, could prevent a local Qaedist group from evolving into a more globally oriented threat. Engagement with the Islamists who gain power in the new Arab world, such as in Egypt, Tunisia, and potentially Syria, will be critical. Recent arrests of extremists in Tunisia highlight how more moderate Islamist groups can help isolate radicals on the fringe. But the outcome of the Arab revolutions is far from clear; Syria, Yemen, Libya, and even Egypt could slip into chaos. And al Qaeda, while very much in decline, is patient.

Brian Fishman is a counterterrorism research fellow at the New America Foundation and a fellow with the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, where he previously served as director of research. Phil Mudd is senior global advisor at Oxford Analytica and previously served as deputy director of the CIA's Counterterrorist Center and deputy director of the FBI's National Security Branch.


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Chapter 3

TUNISIA

Tunisia's New Ennahda

By Marc Lynch, June 29, 2011

Tunisia's post-revolutionary politics are being profoundly shaped by the meteoric rise of the long-banned Islamist movement, Ennahda. Decades of fierce repression during the regime of former President Zine el-Abedine Ben Ali crushed almost every visible manifestation of Tunisia's Islamist movement. The banned movement played a very limited role in the revolution. But since Ben Ali's flight and the triumphant January 30 return of exiled leader Rached Ghannouchi, Ennahda has grown with astonishing speed. A June 2011 survey found support for the party at just below 30 percent, almost three times that of its closest rival. Its ascent is fueling a dangerous polarization, leading putative champions of democracy to endorse the postponing of elections, and frightening many secularists and women who fear for their place in the new Tunisia.

In June 2011, I returned from a trip to Tunisia focused on the resurgence of Ennahda. I emerged impressed with Ennahda's organizational strength, democratic rhetoric, political energy, and by their determined efforts to engage with their political rivals and reassure their critics. But I also emerged with real concerns about the growing polarization and collapse of trust across the political class, which risks dividing the Tunisian public and crippling the desperately needed democratic transition. And I found even Ennahda's leaders unsure about how to grapple with the rising Salafi trend, which may be more of a source of weakness than a source of electoral strength.

There is far more to Tunisia's emerging political arena than just Ennahda, of course. Its rise and the resulting polarization come at a time of deep uncertainty about the fate of the revolution. Much of the old regime remains in place within state institutions, as well as in the Tunisian media, business sector, and cultural elite. Many of those who drove the popular uprising are deeply disgruntled about how little the revolution has changed their lives; while many of the people with whom I spoke were delighted with their newfound freedom, few saw real improvement in economic conditions. Many, particularly in the southern cities where the revolution began, feel that the world has abandoned them and that their revolution has been stolen. While the world largely turned away from Tunisia to focus on crises elsewhere across the region, the transition to democracy there is far from accomplished.

During my visit, I spoke at length with Ennahda President Rached Ghannouchi, Executive Committee member Ziyad Djoulati, and a number of the movement's top political strategists. At a conference organized by the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, I watched a tense panel featuring Secretary-General Hamadi Jebali (with whom I had met with previously), which turned into a riveting political spectacle of fierce debate with critics from all directions. I spoke at that conference on a panel alongside Rached Ghannouchi on the role of religion in democracy — a daunting assignment! I sat through a packed press conference announcing Ennahda's withdrawal from the High Committee to Protect the Revolution, and watched a blistering exchange between the party's leaders and a prominent member of the committee. I attended two Ennahda campaign rallies outside of Tunis, and had lengthy

informal conversations with local activists and party leaders. I saw a lot of pro-Ennahda and anti-Ennahda graffiti on the streets. I also got to talk to a wide range of journalists, civil society activists, academics, foreign observers, and ordinary people in cafes. And sure, I talked with taxi drivers.

The picture that emerged is more complex than the simple assumption of automatic Arab support for Islamist parties would suggest. The Ben Ali regime spent decades crushing any form of visible Islamist political organization in Tunisia. Tens of thousands of the movement's members were imprisoned or exiled, and according to all the leaders with whom I spoke no formal Ennahda organization existed before the revolution. This is a sharp contrast with Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood maintained a highly visible public presence despite being officially banned. This history is double-edged. The long repression meant that Ennahda had to start virtually from scratch in reconstituting itself, and did not have deep existing relationships with Tunisian youth. But it also meant that it was absolutely uncompromised by any relationship with the hated old regime, and could claim an attractive mantle of principled resistance and clean hands.

Ennahda set out to quickly rebuild itself after Ben Ali's flight. Its leaders had been increasingly active in Tunisian opposition circles since the mid-2000s, including convening a forum where representatives of most major political trends came together for sustained dialogues about democracy. A movement which had been largely shaped by its leaders in exile for decades began to find its feet again on the ground, even though continuing regime harassment of members even after their prison terms ended prevented any rebuilding of the organization.

On March 1, 2011, Ennahda was legalized by the interim government, and quickly moved to rebuild the movement. The core leadership immediately reached out to the tens of thousands of former activists just out of prison, many who became locally respected business or civic leaders. They established offices in every Tunisian province, quickly setting up sections for youth, women, social services, and politics and holding internal elections to select a new leadership. Many Tunisian critics of Ennahda asked where the money for all this came from, often pointing to foreign support; when I asked, I was told that the financing came primarily from

these successful former members now rejoining the cause. Whatever the case, money alone is clearly not the whole story. Ennahda threw itself into tireless organizing and mobilization, with Ghannouchi himself visiting 22 out of the 24 provinces since his return to the country. If Ennahda is better organized and more present at the local level than its rivals, this is due less to some natural "Islamist" appeal than to a tireless organizational campaign which others might have also tried.

The rallies I attended in Hammam Lief and the small southern town of Hajeb l'Aloun (60 km from Kairouan) showed the care and energy Ennahda brought to these mobilization efforts. In Hammam Lief, some 4,000 people turned out to see Ghannouchi, including everyone from men dressed in signature Salafi style and veiled mothers with young children to young women in tight jeans and tank tops. The rally's first speaker was a female academic who spoke forcefully about the role of women in the revolution and in Tunisian society. Music was provided by a small troupe which included both men and unveiled women performing under an enormous banner of Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock (for all the careless talk of how the Arab revolutions were not about Palestine or America, this Ennahda rally featured a tremendous amount of evidently well-received pro-Palestinian rhetoric as well as a rousing, sure to be chart-topping song with the refrain "no to American military bases, no to foreign interventions"). Ghannouchi himself was received like a rock star — a far cry from his careful intellectual performance on our panel at the conference. The smaller rally in the south, by contrast, attracted a much more conservatively dressed crowd, and focused on local issues. Where the other rally flew Libyan rebel flags and posters of Jerusalem, these banners highlighted local health care concerns and slogans defending the centrality of democracy, toleration, and pluralism to Islam.

Ennahda's leaders are highly sensitive to the fears among other Tunisians and in the West about Islamist movements. Ghannouchi told me that Ennahda had instructed its supporters to not come to the airport to meet him upon his return for fear of creating images reminiscent of Khomeini's return to Iran. Everyone pointed out the dangers of repeating the experience of Algeria in 1991, where massive electoral victories for the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) led to a military coup and descent into years of horrific, brutal civil war, and the Hamas electoral victory in 2006 which resulted in international sanctions and an enduring intra-Palestinian political divide.

The word of the hour was "consensus," with all stressing the need for broad societal agreement on major policy decisions. Djoulati said Tunisia would need at least five years of "consensual democracy" until the consolidation of the democratic transition, with all parties committing to not use electoral gains to impose their preferences on others. Ghannouchi spoke frequently about the model of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) — whose approach his own writings reportedly inspired — and all Ennahda leaders point to their documents supporting political and civil freedoms and political democracy. When pushed on the extent of its commitment to democratic norms, Ghannouchi said that even if the constitutional convention decided to eliminate article one declaring Tunisia to be an Arab Islamic state, Ennahda would respond by campaigning to convince the Tunisian public that this had been a bad idea and mobilizing pressure within the system.

But for all of these efforts, Tunisia's politics are increasingly polarized into two camps and the foundations of this consensus are crumbling. The tremendous uncertainty about virtually everything makes credible commitments almost impossible. There is no consensus on the relative strength of the different political trends, no new constitution, no new political party law or other foundational rules of the game. Ennahda leaders complain that they are the victims of a massive scare-mongering campaign in the media, fueled by remnants of the old regime and by the Francophone, secularist elites who benefited from the old order. They also complain about the decision to postpone the first round of elections by three months, which they took as a clearly partisan intervention designed to give their competitors more time to organize against them. Their decision to withdraw from the Council for the Achievement of the Aims of the Revolution in protest over what they call anti-democratic and non-consensual decision-making only demonstrated concretely the rapid deterioration of the early hopes of consensus.

Ennahda's critics view the party's calls for consensual democracy as a thinly disguised quest for hegemony, and express deep fears about whether the Islamist party will maintain its moderate discourse once in power. They see Ennahda's political maneuvers as evidence of a more extreme agenda, and put little stake in the mild rhetoric of its leaders. They complain that Ennahda refused to

put out a concrete program, which may be a rational move for the front-runners to avoid giving their rivals something to attack but which also raises doubts about their true commitments. I saw "no to Ennahda" graffiti scrawled on an impressive number of walls (most people I asked thought that the old regime hands were behind it, but who knows), and heard both intensely positive and negative comments from a wide variety of people (most of whom had nothing but contempt or indifference for any other political party). In a political environment increasingly wired for polarization and harder-line rhetoric, and with great uncertainty about either the rules of the political game or the real political balance of power, these doubts and mistrust will only grow. "The discourse of Ennahda's leaders is not the practice of its activists in the mosques and on the street," complained one prominent feminist. I heard quite a bit about this alleged gap between the Ennahda leadership's progressive, reformist, democratic rhetoric and the more extreme behavior of its cadres from the movement's critics.

It is here that the rising Salafi trend poses a particular challenge to Ennahda. There is no clearly defined Salafi political leadership — Hezb al-Tahrir, which gets a lot of press, represents only a small fraction — but by most accounts the trend is large and growing. Ennahda leaders argue that Ben Ali encouraged the rise of the Salafis as a counter-balance to their politically-minded movement, for years allowing Salafi books to be sold freely and for Salafi preachers to dominate local mosques while Ennahda leaders were imprisoned and their literature banned. Indeed, several Ennahda leaders told me that the rise of Tunisian Salafis demonstrated that "repression creates extremism." This is particularly the case with the youth, few who remember Ennahda and who were far more exposed to Salafi ideas in the mosques and on satellite TV during the Ben Ali years.

While this trend might at first glance be seen as a source of electoral strength for Ennahda, it poses a challenge because suspicious Tunisians worried about "Islamism" in general may hold Ennahda responsible for Salafi actions. In June 2011, a group of Salafis attacked a movie theater in downtown Tunis, shocking many Tunisians and sparking a wave of media commentaries. At a subsequent press conference at the party headquarters, Ghannouchi strongly condemned the attacks, affirming that Ennahda rejects any form of political violence or intellectual extremism. But at the same time, he reserved the right to defend Tunisian values — a caveat which immediately triggered the suspicions of his critics about Ennahda's true intentions.

It is vitally important that Tunisia's politics finds a way to deal with the rising strength of Ennahda within a broad social and political consensus on political order. The decision to delay the elections for a constitutional convention may have been necessary on technical grounds, but proved destructive in other ways — undermining trust among the major players, giving more time for the old regime to find its footing and entrench its interests within the new system, and blunting the democratic transition. Tunisia's politicians should pull back from their rush towards polarization...but probably won't, since each side has strong political incentives to continue to play those cards. Fear of Ennahda should not be accepted as an excuse to further delay Tunisian elections, the writing of a new constitution, and a democratic transition.

Marc Lynch is associate professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University where he is the director of the Institute of Middle East Studies and Project on Middle East Political Science. Follow him @abuaardvark.

Suspicion and Strategy in Free Tunisia

By Christopher Alexander, June 20, 2011

Walls across Tunisia where the Arab Spring began display a dramatic red calendar with an image of joined hands above the phrase "Tunis Hurra" — Free Tunisia. The image reflects more aspiration than reality. Tunisians may have freed themselves from a dictator, but they are not holding hands. Economic stagnation, pent up social demands, and a combination of political and cultural tensions are generating deep suspicion and anxiety across the country. The country which began the wave of revolution and has arguably advanced the farthest toward a democratic transition faces deep challenges.

After former President Zine el-Abdine Ben Ali and his family fled the country on January 14, 2011 in the face of a massive popular uprising, Tunisia's interim government in March 2011 decided to begin the country's democratic transition with elections for a constituent assembly rather than immediately select a new president. The elected assembly will appoint a new interim president, act as an interim legislature, and — most importantly — write a new constitution. Once voters ratify that constitution, they will go to the polls again to elect a new legislature and president.

This sequence came from the High Commission for the Realization of the Objectives of the Revolution, of Political Reform, and Democratic Transition — a body made up of political parties, civil society organizations, and influential personalities that has become the chief architect of political reform in Tunisia. The High Commission wanted to reform the constitution first in order to avoid the possibility of an elected president who might use an undemocratic constitution to become a new dictator (a model which is looked to with some envy by many Egyptians).

The process initially commanded widespread support, but has since encountered turbulence. The government initially scheduled the constituent assembly elections for July 24, 2011. In late May, however, the electoral commission announced its intention to delay the vote because it needed more time to ensure that it would be fair and credible. After several days of heated debate, interim Prime Minister Beji Caid Sebsi announced that the vote would take place on October 23, 2011. Most of the country's 93 political parties supported the delay, but it extended and intensified the anxious uncertainty that has reigned in the country since Ben Ali fled the country on January 14, 2011.

The stakes in the first election were high. Many Tunisians believed that the October 2011 vote would provide a preview of the likely outcomes of presidential and legislative elections. More importantly, the fact that the assembly will rewrite the constitution forces

Tunisians to confront profound questions about Tunisia's political values and identity. Many people, and not just Islamists, believe that Tunisian politics has been dominated since independence by a privileged caste of Francophone elites, educated in European or European-style institutions, whose lives do not look very much like the lives of the majority of the population. These elites — in both the government and the opposition parties — share an interest in maintaining a closed, self-serving political game that traffics in the language of democracy and development but does little to address the needs of real people. Their critics resent those elites who they view as smugly dismissive of the values of the majority of the population.

Many secular Tunisians fear that a strong showing by the Islamist Ennadha Party and its allies will result in a constitution that makes it easier for Islamists to chip away at individual liberties. Ennadha leaders insist that they do not want to dominate the assembly and that they support democracy, individual freedom, and women's rights. In the absence of any legal safeguard, however, many secularists are not ready to take Ennadha at its word. They accuse the party of saying different things to different audiences and refusing to accept a clear distinction between religious and political spheres.

Many socially conservative Tunisians — and it is important to say that they are not all Islamists — also express concerns about individual liberties. They fear that an assembly dominated by secular left politicians will craft a constitution that limits their right to practice their faith in their private lives. "If our secular left was like the left in the United States, we wouldn't be so worried," one Ennadha leader commented. "But they're not. They are influenced and supported by the secular left in France. How do we know that they won't invoke European notions of 'modernity' and 'progress' to follow France's example and ban the veil?"

The beginning of the electoral campaign accentuated these fears and suspicions. The new electoral code created strong incentives for coalition-building, and three camps are taking shape. Parties on the far left formed a "democratic modernist pole." The other two camps are dominated by Ennadha and by the center-left Parti Démocrate Progressiste (PDP). Past polls showed that Ennadha and the PDP are the two most popular parties among the minority of Tunisians who have decided they would vote in October 2011. Both parties enjoy name recognition and credibility as longtime opponents of the former regime. Both have well-known leaders and they have done more than the other parties to expand their organizations across the country. Both parties are rumored to receive substantial funding from like-minded organizations outside Tunisia.

Consequently, the fight for allies is on and that fight is generating rhetoric and tactics that reinforce popular fears and stereotypes.

Concerned about the possible consequences of leaving fundamental issues to a body that might contain a strong Islamist contingent, some on the left suggested that the High Commission, rather than the constituent assembly, should reform the constitution. When that proposition failed, several left figures proposed a set of statements that lay out fundamental principles that all the parties must accept in the elections. Ennadha argued that these initiatives, along with the delay in the elections, revealed the left's mistrust of the Tunisian people and its willingness to circumvent democratic politics. Left parties ramped up their rhetoric about the importance of defending Tunisia's modern and progressive values in ways that emphasize the cultural divide between them and the Islamists.

Much of this rhetoric was strategic. Away from the microphones, many politicians on the left and the right say that they do not believe the other camp could dominate the assembly. But they need to rally their troops in what could be a close race. Many of today's parties will not survive the October test. As one party leader put it, "We will have to start a graveyard for parties once the October vote is done." Some will simply close down; others will blend with larger parties. Ennadha itself will likely change under the pressure of competition. But this is a necessary part of the transition to a more consolidated field of options for Tunisian voters when they elect their first democratic government.

Tunisia continues to be the region's best hope for a democratic transition in the near future. Tunisians know that others are watching them closely. Much of their contemporary anxiety is a product of uncertainty — economic and political. Tunisians are accustomed to the former, but the latter is a new thing.

Christopher Alexander is Davidson College's McGee director of the Dean Rusk International Studies Program, an associate professor of political science, and author of Tunisia: Stability and Reform in the Modern Maghreb.

The Limits of Anti-Islamism in Tunisia

By Melanie Cammett, October 31, 2011

Most commentary about the results of Tunisia's historic election on October 23, 2011 has focused on the success of the moderate Islamist party Ennahda. With 41.5 percent of seats in the constitutional assembly, Ennahda certainly did score an impressive victory. But two other results of equal importance should not be overlooked. Several liberal and leftist parties also did well, giving strong representation to the major political trends in the assembly. And even more striking, the parties that banked upon an explicitly anti-Islamist campaign message lost badly.

By any standard, Tunisia's elections marked a crucial step toward the institutionalization of democracy in a country that has endured decades of dictatorship. The peaceful and orderly process of holding elections set an important regional precedent. But the election campaign exposed an important rift between Islamists and secularists that will have enduring effects on Tunisian politics. How the assembly and the competing political forces deal with those issues will be decisive in determining whether the elections paved the way for a genuine democratic transition.

Ennahda's performance demonstrated its very real strength across the country. Although Ennahda's share of the popular vote was lower in many districts given the number of "wasted" votes for parties that failed to win seats, the results clearly showed that Islamists have significant appeal across the country — not just in the poor and marginalized districts of the south and west but also in the wealthier, more developed coastal areas. Ennahda has enjoyed widespread legitimacy because its members were the most

repressed under Ben Ali's rule, particularly in the 1990s when many in its leadership and rank and file endured torture and long prison sentences. The party is also viewed as honest and not corrupt, a perception that holds a lot of weight in light of the abuses of the Ben Ali and Trabelsi families. As many Tunisians told me, "They are not thieves."

However, Ennahda is not the only actor in Tunisian politics that is seen as honest, and there are other elements that contributed to the party's success. Key figures in Ettakatol or the Forum Démocratique pour le Travail et les Libertés (FDTL), the Congrés pour la République (CPR), and the Pôle Démocratique Moderniste (PDM), among other parties and political figures, also enjoy "clean" reputations. Ennahda also ran an extremely professional and effective campaign, with a ground game that put its rivals to shame. When I asked Ennahda officials how they managed to develop an extensive grassroots presence in Tunisia in a short time period and despite decades of exile, imprisonment, and repression, they replied, "We were always there." Neighborhood residents have known Ennahda supporters for decades, and were impressed by their good behavior, honest dealings with other citizens, and commitment to their principles. Furthermore, the message of Ennahda resonates broadly in the population. Clearly, religion and apparent respect for Islam matters to many Tunisians, and Ennahda benefited from this, particularly in light of perceived attacks on religious values in the weeks leading up to the elections.

The second-ranked party, the CPR, gained about 14 percent of the seats and the third-ranked party, Ettakatol, received about 10 percent of the seats in the assembly. Based in London, Hamdi is a former member of Ennahda who split from the party and apparently had some dealings with Ben Ali. Despite almost no local media coverage during the campaign, Hamdi's lists won 19 seats, allegedly because he appealed to voters in his own region of the historically marginalized south and because he promised lavish social benefits.

The elections highlighted and heightened the apparent Islamist-secularist cleavage in contemporary Tunisia. The vote for the members of the constitutional assembly was presented by some secularists and Ennahda officials alike as akin to a referendum on the cultural identity of the country. In the months leading up to the elections, secularists expressed their fears about the prospect of an Ennahda victory, claiming that the party's leadership continually engaged in "double speak" by failing to present strong positions defending free expression and women's rights and by craftily concealing a longer-term agenda to impose "sharia law" on Tunisia. In the campaign's closing days, the Parti Démocratique Progressiste (PDP) aired an inflammatory advertisement warning about the extreme measures that Ennahda would supposedly impose on the "Day After" its election.

The outcry following the airing of the film "Persepolis" on Nessma TV, a private television station, likely worked in favor of Ennahda and hurt those parties, such as the PDP and PDM, which defended the station's right to show the film and, by extension, the right to free speech even when it offends the religious sensibilities of some people. Although Ennahda leaders renounced the acts of violence against the home of Nessma's owner, they remained opposed to the station's decision to air the film, which includes a visual depiction of God, as an affront to religion. This position likely appealed to a portion of the electorate. Ennahda supporters often claim that Tunisian secularists espouse foreign values and aim to impose their own, alien vision of society on what is at base a more conservative society.

In the end, the parties that played the anti-Ennahda card most vehemently lost while those that presented themselves as more tolerant and open to possible coalitions with the Islamist party performed relatively well. Moncef Marzouki's CPR and Mustapha Ben Jaafar's Ettakatol are run by longstanding secular opponents of the Ben Ali regime who chose to adopt a relatively conciliatory tone vis-à-vis Ennahda. As an official from Ettakatol told me, "We don't attack Ennahda directly because everyone who cares about religion will think we're against religion and that only Ennahda defends it." But Ahmed Néjib Chebbi's PDP and the secular leftist PDM both rejected an alliance with Ennahda and made opposition to the Islamist party a key part of their platforms. These two parties fared poorly in the elections with 17 and 5 seats out of 217 in the assembly, respectively.

These mutual suspicions have characterized the post-revolutionary institution building process. From the beginning, Ennahda was concerned that the High Commission for the Fulfillment of Revolutionary Goals, Political Reform and Democratic Transition, which

acted as the main policy making body and selected the electoral rules, was disproportionately staffed by members of leftist and secularist opposing groups. Although Ennahda had representatives in the High Commission, periodic tensions flared up over specific issues and the party ultimately resigned when the body opted to adopt decisions by majority vote rather than consensus. In part to allay its fears that the elections would be rigged, Ennahda placed monitors in each of the more than 7,000 polling stations across the country. Based on information gathered from its extensive network of representatives at the ballot boxes, the party preemptively announced its victory less than one day after the elections and well before the official results were released. At a press conference held by the National Democratic Institute the day after the elections, Said Ferjani, a member of the party's political bureau, told me and several journalists a fairly precise estimate of the number of seats and margin of victory that the party would obtain, even as candidates from other parties emphasized on television talk shows that the votes were not yet tallied.

While Islamists have feared that transitional governing institutions were stacked against them, their secularist opponents worry that Ennahda will use its newfound power to impose its social and religious agenda on Tunisians and, therefore, they will lose their hard-won liberties as well as the rights bestowed on women under the dictatorship. The split between Islamists and secularists is the defining issue of Tunisian society and politics at this juncture and, with such deep-seated mutual suspicions and seemingly irreconcilable positions on what constitutes "free speech" and liberties, it is difficult to see how a resolution can be achieved.

The election results most directly affect the composition of the new government and the process of writing new rules of the game. It is almost axiomatic in politics that victors aim to rewrite the rules in their favor. The relative weights of the different parties and their respective preferences for the design of executive institutions and electoral laws will therefore shape the structure of the new governing system. But Ennahda has demonstrated considerable sensitivity to the fears it provokes in the West and at home. Ennahda claims that it is open to negotiations with all willing partners and, even before the results were officially announced, established alliances with other parties elected to the assembly. This may reassure some of its critics that the Islamist party will not fully dominate the process of writing the new constitution.

Ennahda claims that it is a moderate party along the lines of the Turkish Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (AKP). Indeed, the intellectual foundations of the two parties are intertwined — leaders of the AKP were apparently inspired by the work of Rached Ghannouchi, the Ennahda party leader, whose writings emphasize the compatibility of Islam and democracy. Nonetheless, the AKP analogy does not reassure Ennahda's staunchest opponents who claim that the Kemalist legacy of secularism, constitutional guarantees, and the prospect of accession to the European Union put automatic constraints on the Turkish Islamist party that are not present in Tunisia. The AKP's growing control over the media and different branches of government give some Tunisian secularists further misgivings about the AKP model. Bridging this deep divide and building trust between Islamists and secularists will require continuous dialogue and debate over the long-term.

Melani Cammett is associate professor of political science and director of the Middle East Studies Program at Brown University.

Ennahda's Tight Rope Act on Religion

By Aaron Y. Zelin, November 18, 2011

On November 13, 2011, the Tunisian Islamist party Ennahda — fresh off its win in the October elections — came under fire following a rally in Sousse, Tunisia with Houda Naim, a member of Hamas. Ennahda's general secretary, Hammadi Jebali, who became the new Prime Minister, made some controversial remarks about the return of the Caliphate. Jebali stated: "My brothers, you are at a historic moment...in a new cycle of civilization, God willing...we are in sixth caliphate, God willing." This quickly raised alarm bells with Tunisia's secular and liberal elements who had been warning prior to the elections about Ennahda's purported double speak: saying one thing publicly while saying something more nefarious privately to its followers.

In response to Jebali's pronouncement Ettakatol, a party that won the fourth largest bloc of seats in the October 2011 election, said the party was suspending its participation in talks on a governing coalition in the Tunisian Constituent Assembly. Khemais Ksila, a member of the executive committee of Ettakatol, stated: "We do not accept this statement. We thought we were going to build a second republic with our partner, not a sixth caliphate." While Lobna Jeribi, an Ettakatol constituent assembly member, proclaimed that Jebali's statements raised major concerns that needed to be clarified before any coalition talks resumed.

This is not the first controversy that Ennahda has been embroiled in since they won a little more than 40 percent of seats to draft the constitution in the constituent assembly. Talking to Radio Monte Carlo Doualiya, Souad Abderrahim, a prominent female member of Ennahda, stated that single mothers are a disgrace to Tunisia, "do not have the right to exist," there are limits on "full and

absolute freedom," and that one should not "make excuses for people who have sinned." In both cases, Ennahda had to walk back the statements of both Jebali and Abderrahim, downplaying their significance.

Are these two rexamples a sign of double speak finally seeing the light of day in the aftermath of its election victory — or is it a sign of Ennahda's political immaturity and lack of experience? The latter is more likely. Prior to and following the election there have were no signs of some type of hostile Islamist takeover by Ennahda that would then try and institute a radical interpretation of the sharia.

A few days before the election, the president of Ennahda, Rached Ghannouchi, emphasized the importance of reconciliation even if Ennahda did not win a plurality, stating: "We will congratulate the winner and will collaborate with them just as other parties should do the same if we end up winning; Tunisia is in need of everyone. The keyword is reconciliation, our foremost concern is reconciliation in composing the upcoming government without regard to ideological differences." After the elections, Ghannouchi stressed that Ennahda did not plan to instrumentalize the new constitution as a blunt tool to force a certain interpretation of Islam on Tunisian citizens, arguing, "Egypt says sharia is the main source of its law, but that didn't prevent [deposed President Hosni] Mubarak from being a dictator." Ghannouchi in the past has also pointed to Turkey as an example where one can balance both democratic and religious values without compromising either.

Further, Ennahda participated in talks over with two secular parties, Congress for the Republic and Ettakatol, to form a coalition government for the constituent assembly. As one can see from the above comments by Ettakatol, the two secular parties will no doubt play a productive role and provide a check on any potential Ennahda overreach.

One should be cognizant, though, that the transition will not be perfect. Moreover, with every potential accommodation Ennahda makes now that they are in power, it could erode potential grassroots support. More radical youth elements may believe that after years of suffering under the yoke of former Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali it is time to finally implement the oft-quoted phrase "al-Islam huwa al-Hal"; or "Islam is the Solution." By not living up to these words one could foresee a scenario in which some support is shifted to the less mainstream Salafi movement, fomenting a potential culture war in Tunisia in the medium future.

Ennahda's pledge to respect women's rights and not regulate social issues, such as wearing a bikini at the beach or the sale of alcohol, could become contentious issues in future elections that could pull Ennahda further to the right. Even if they do not, as more time passes since the fall of the Ben Ali regime and there are more freedoms and openness in Tunisian society, the contestation of the role of religion, its meaning, and interpretation will become a heated debate. In the near-term, though, with Ghannouchi stewarding Ennahda through the transition, such potential drift or confrontation is less likely.

Ennahda's transition from banned opposition party to a leading voice of reform for civic Islamism is still playing out. There will be ups and downs, but its political discipline and maturity will rise over time. If there is one political party in the Middle East and North Africa that can navigate the tough challenge ahead on debating the contentious issue of the role of religion in society, Tunisia's Ennahda Party is best situated for the task. Although talk of the Caliphate is a head-turning event for many in Tunisia and in the West, since January 2011, Ennahda's actual actions should be speaking louder than some of their ill-conceived words.

Aaron Y. Zelin is a research associate in the Department of Politics at Brandeis University. He is a co-editor of the al-Wasat blog and maintains the website Jihadology.net.

Rached Ghannouchi: The FP Interview

By Marc Lynch, December 5, 2011

"I think the Muslim Brotherhood [in Egypt] should govern by coalition that includes the people from secular parties and the Copts." That was the advice that Rached Ghannouchi, president of Tunisia's Ennahda Party, offered his Egyptian Islamist counterparts during an interview with the editors of the Middle East Channel on December 1, 2011. He warned pointedly against repeating the mistakes of Algeria when, as he put it, "the Islamists won 80 percent of the vote but they completely ignored the influential minority of secularists, of the army, of the business community. So they did a coup d'etat against the democratic process and Algeria is still suffering from that." Avoiding a replay of that catastrophe weighs heavily on Ghannouchi and his party.

Ghannouchi was in Washington at the invitation of *Foreign Policy*, after being named one of its "Top 100 Global Thinkers." He took full advantage of the opportunity to visit the United States for the first time in 20 years, appearing at a wide range of think tanks including the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and meeting with a range of U.S. government officials, journalists, and policy analysts. He had warm praise for the Obama administration as "supportive of the Arab Spring," and described the new willingness in the United States to talk about a more positive relationship between democracy and Islam, and between Americans and the Islamic world, as a very important new development. His reception

in Washington is a sign of the times, as the United States struggles to adapt to the reality of Islamist electoral success and Islamist parties struggle to reassure those who fear their ascent while delivering on their own programs.

I last saw Ghannouchi in June 2011, when I was in Tunisia researching an article about Ennahda. I had asked Ghannouchi at that time what Ennahda might do with an electoral victory, and he had assured me that it would seek a national unity government. It did just that. After Ennahda scored a major victory in Tunisia's first post-Zine al Abedine Ben Ali election, it quickly formed a national unity government while ceding the post of president to the secular human rights campaigner Moncef Marzouki. Ghannouchi explained that his party "would opt for a coalition government even if Ennahda achieves an absolute majority, because we don't want the people to perceive that they have moved from a single party dominant in the political life to another single party dominating the political life." Such reassurances have been meant to respond to the suspicions of Islamists and the political polarization endemic to post-Ben Ali Tunisia — and seem thus far to have succeeded.

When I asked Ghannouchi what Ennahda's top priority would be in government, he answered not with talk of sharia [Islamic law] but with a "guarantee that dictatorship will not return to Tunisia." He dismissed fears that Ennahda employed a "double discourse" (i.e. saying one thing in English and something else at home) as a relic of the Ben Ali era's propaganda. He acknowledged that Ennahda was a large movement, with many distinct points of view, but insisted that "there are no people in Ennahda who are *takfiri* [i.e. declaring opponents to be non-Muslims]; there is no one in Ennahda that believes that violence is a means of change or to keep power; there is no one in Ennahda that does not believe in equality between men and women; no one in Ennahda believes that *jihad* is a way to impose Islam on the world."

But Ghannouchi clearly understands both the difficulty and the urgency of convincing Tunisian secularists and outside observers of those convictions. He told me that he expected the party to be judged by its performance. He insisted that Ennahda's commitment to democracy had been strengthened by the Ben Ali experience, when thousands of its members were imprisoned or forced into exile. "The prosecution of Ennahda movement could have led us to violence, and this is what Ben Ali wanted. But our experience in prison has deepened our belief in freedom and democracy, and Ben Ali failed to drag us into violence. And that's why he fell."

And what of the Salafis with more extreme views? Ghannouchi laughed, "if Tunis becomes Salafi country, nothing can be guaranteed." Tunisians tended toward moderation in their Islamic beliefs, he emphasized, which shaped Ennahda's approach. Turning serious, he went on to argue that Salafis grew radical under torture and repression, and argued that in a more open environment Ennahda would help convince them to adopt more moderate understandings of Islam. When I pushed him, he said bluntly that Ennahda would actively resist any Salafi efforts to push for a more Islamic constitution. His party will be judged by whether it lives up to such commitments.

An edited version of the interview follows:

ML: Last time we met, you were preparing for elections and you didn't know what would happen. Were you surprised by the results?

RG: I was not surprised by the results. All the polls that were conducted showed that Ennahda was ahead. I was expecting the results to be slightly better for Ennahda, but the electoral code did not allow a better result to happen.

ML: The Ennahda party in the constituent assembly now has formed a coalition. Could you describe your thinking, or the thinking of the party, in forming that coalition?

RG: We have declared since before the elections that we would opt for a coalition government, even if Ennahda achieves an absolute majority, because we don't want the people to perceive that they have moved from a single party dominant in the political life to another single party dominating the political life.

[We did this] because the picture on the Tunisian scene is more beautiful and colorful with a coalition and also, frankly, because the next phase is a sensitive phase and there are big challenges, and it is an adventure for a single party to go it alone during this phase.

ML: How are you trying to reassure people who are afraid of Ennahda?

RG: There is definitely a faction of people that are still not reassured with Ennahda. But the results show that we succeeded with a good chunk of the population, from men and women, in showing that we are serious about our projects in establishing democracy and assuring development.

In any case, we are not aspiring to reach 99 percent. The people who do not trust us, it's normal, because for 22 years they have been subject to propaganda from Ben Ali which has discredited us, and made people fearful of us.

ML: What about the people who truly are scared, how do you reassure them?

RG: We will defend their right to be in the opposition. And we will prove to them by our deeds that their fears about double discourse — about us saying [things] we will not do — that this is just an old heritage from the Ben Ali era.

ML: How can people be sure that Ennahda as a whole, as a movement or as a party, will follow your thinking?

RG: Ennahda is a movement, it is not just a small party. It is not strange in Ennahda that we have many currents and many thoughts, and that's why the president of Ennahda has never achieved 99 percent — but he's elected. So he reflects the opinion of the majority.

Ennahda is not a collection of many parties, it is just one party. There are common denominators that unite all members of Ennahda: There is no one in Ennahda who doubts about Islam. There is no one in Ennahda that believes in extremist views of Islam. There are no people in Ennahda that are *takfir* people. There is no one in Ennahda that believes violence is a means of change or to keep power. Everyone in Ennahda believes that democracy is the only way to reach power and to stay in power. There is no one in Ennahda that does not believe in equality between men and women, and the rights of women. No one in Ennahda believes that jihad is a way to impose Islam on the world. But we believe that jihad is self-control, is social and political struggle, and even military jihad is only a way to defend oneself in the case of aggression.

ML: What are the priorities of Ennahda?

RG: We will guarantee that dictatorship will not come back to Tunis. We are for a parliamentary system which no longer gives us a person with concentrated powers. Our utmost priority is to guarantee freedoms: personal freedoms, social freedoms, and women's rights. We did not ask to add anything to the first article of the old constitution, which says that Tunisia is an Arab and a Muslim country. And everyone seems to agree on this in Tunisia.

ML: How will you respond if Salafi parties try to push for more Islam in the constitution?

RG: The law is always made by people, through their representatives, and the people are not asking for more than this today.

ML: So, if a Salafi member puts on the table...

RG (in English): If Tunis becomes Salafi country, nothing can be guaranteed. (laughing)

ML: So you would actively resist?

RG: Yes.

The Salafis in Tunis are a very small minority, very small groups. We defend their right to exist, and to express themselves. We believe that in a free environment we can convince these people that their understanding of Islam is not a good understanding. We are not afraid or concerned. What we are keen on is the establishment of freedom in the country.

The Tunisian people are moderate in their Islamic beliefs, and these currents — the Salafists — have been established in the absence of Ennahda, and the absence of freedom. It started in Egypt, in the dark places of prisons of Abdel Nasser, and also in light of torture.

The prosecution of Ennahda movement could have led us to violence, and this is what Ben Ali wanted. But our experience in prison has deepened our belief in freedom and democracy, and Ben Ali failed to drag us into violence. And that's why he fell.

ML: Were you able to maintain any organization under Ben Ali?

Our organization had been dismantled during Ben Ali term; the only thing is we kept a very small organization just to keep feeding our families.

ML: How did you rebuild it so quickly?

RG: People unite around ideas so when the idea is there and the people who carry these ideas are there it's very easy to bring them back.

We did not start from nothing. We started from our histories through 40 years now. There was not a single family in Tunisia that was spared from this. Every family had either a martyr, a prisoner, or somebody who was kicked out from their work. Ennahda is deep rooted in the Tunisian society. It's not just into individuals, it's into families. People have sympathy for those people who have been prosecuted in general.

ML: So tell me about Egypt. How is Egypt different from Tunisia? Have you personally had conversations with leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood?

RG: Many times we had conversations and dialogue. The Egyptian youth read my books with admiration.

But the Egyptian equation is much more complicated than the Tunisian equation. There are religious minorities and ethnic minorities in Egypt. There is a strong Salafi movement. The role of the army is different in Egypt than it is in Tunisia.

ML: So what is your advice to the Muslim Brotherhood? Can they repeat what you did?

I think the Ikhwan should govern by coalition, a coalition that includes the people from secular parties although they are minorities, the Copt also, people close to the military. These minorities are small. But they are extremely influential. For them to succeed it's very important to bring all these people together into a coalition.

In the election process it's an honest competition and everybody should get their fair share. However, governing is another issue. The balance of power should represent the weight of the people not in terms of numbers but in terms of influence.

This is the mistake that happened in Algeria when the Islamists won 80 percent of the vote but they completely ignored the influential minority of secularists, of the army, of the business community. So they did a coup d'etat against the democratic process and Algeria is still suffering from that. This is why we always insisted on a national unity government.

The MB is a big movement, it's an entrenched movement and a responsible movement as well and I don't think they will embark on any foolish adventure.

ML: What about America? Do you think the United States is doing the right thing?

RG: I think America this time did the right choice. It supported the people instead of supporting the rulers.

I found in Washington a great optimism about the Arab Spring, especially in Tunisia. The official positions by President Obama, by Secretary of State Clinton and the ambassadors in the region in general are positive and are supportive of the Arab Spring. This is very rare that it happens. But I think it's a good thing and a very good start.

I'm very pleased when I come to Washington and people are starting to talk about harmony between democracy and Islam. This is a new thing and this pleased me a lot. This is a very very deep and important change in understanding especially in the area of interrelationship between Islam and the west. This is very important at the level of political understandings.

ML: And Obama?

RG: President Obama has a different view about the future and the relation with the Muslim world. He's an intellectual. He has a vision. He has a world vision and vision toward history as well and the importance of Islam in the world. And his speeches in Istanbul and Cairo show his deep understanding and vision.

I'm really pleased and I think his policies toward the Arab Spring are good and positive, for the record.

Tunisians Voted for jobs, Not Islam

By Michael Robbins, Mark Tessler, December 7, 2011

On October 23, 2011, Tunisians went to the polls to participate in the first elections since the Arab Spring. The elections were widely considered free and fair, representing a significant triumph in a region long beset by authoritarianism. With a turnout rate of just over 50 percent, the plurality of Tunisians — around 40 percent — cast their votes for Ennadha, or the Renaissance Party, a moderate Islamist party. Despite a clear victory over its nearest competitors, a number of more secularly minded parties won a similar percentage of the vote implying that this was not an absolute victory for the Islamist camp. Given the repression of political parties and the relatively short period between the Jasmine Revolution and the election, it is not entirely apparent what these election results mean about the preferences of ordinary citizens.

Shortly before the election, between September 30 and October 11, 2011, the second wave of the Arab Barometer — an 11-country public opinion poll — was conducted in Tunisia. The survey's findings demonstrated that Ennahda's victory was not a clear call for a more religious political system. The survey also provided insight into the broader political concerns of ordinary citizens, their attitudes toward the Jasmine Revolution and Tunisia's ongoing political transition, as well as their preferences about the type of political system that should be utilized to govern their country.

Based on the election results, there appeared to be a more-or-less equal division between supporters and opponents of political Islam. There was some evidence for this understanding in the Arab Barometer. In response to a question on the proper basis for making laws, 65 percent of respondents indicated that they agreed with the statement that the government should implement only

the sharia laws compared to 84 percent who stated that the government should make laws in accordance with the wishes of the people. An even higher percentage — 86 percent — stated that the government should implement the sharia laws in some areas and make laws according to people's wishes in others, indicating that Tunisians believe that Islam should inform some elements of political life. Thus, it appears that Tunisians tend to support laws that are both grounded in the will of the people and in accordance with religious law.

Other indicators suggest that Tunisians are not overly supportive of a significant role for Islam in political affairs. Although divisions exist within the party, Rached Ghannouchi, the long-time leader of Ennahda, has consistently stated that he and his party represent a progressive strain of Islamic reformism rather than a movement seeking to institute an Islamic state. This understanding of Islam's role in politics — informing but not driving — appears consistent with the desires of a majority of respondents. When asked specifically about the role Islam should play in public life, sizeable majorities believed it should be minimal. For instance, 78.4 percent of respondents agreed that men of religion should not influence how citizens vote in elections, only 30.6 percent believed that it would be better for Tunisia if more religious officials held public office, and just 25.4 percent stated that men of religion should influence decisions of government. Moreover, 78.5 percent agreed with the statement that religion is a private matter that should be separate from social and political life. Thus, while many Tunisians believed that laws should generally not contravene sharia, most do not seek an active role for religion or religious officials in public life.

Nevertheless, perceptions of Ennahda as an organization are more favorable than might be expected given its self-identification with Islam and the Islamist movement. Approximately half of respondents (49.4 percent) stated that they trust the party. This level of trust exceeded that of many organizations, including the Tunisian Labor Federation (37.8 percent), civil society organizations (43.8 percent), and political parties in general (28.2 percent). Trust was significantly higher for other political actors, however, including the transitional government (66.3 percent), the courts (55.9 percent), the police (61.2 percent), and the armed forces (92.6 percent).

Despite fairly high levels of trust in Ennahda, stated support for the party was significantly lower. When respondents were asked which party best represented their aspirations for political, social, and economic development, only 11.9 percent chose Ennahda. Yet, when asked which party they would vote for in the elections, 19.9 percent stated Ennahda, likely implying that local factors and candidate selection were key elements of Ennahda's electoral success. Other factors also help to explain why Ennahda's vote share was significantly higher than the proportion of respondents who favor the party's Islamist platform. One is Ennahda's effective get-out-the-vote effort, which was far superior to that of any other party. Another is the legitimacy earned through years of opposition to the Ben Ali regime. Moreover, as one of the international election monitors was told, many Tunisians voted for Ennahda because the party knows those who were involved in the systematic oppression and, accordingly, it is better able than others to ensure that important members of the former regime do not slip back into the political arena.

Reflecting on the Jasmine Revolution in the days prior to the election, half of respondents stated that they had benefited from the Revolution while a further 40 percent responded that the situation was more or less unchanged. Only 10 percent believed that they were worse off because of these political changes.

Citizens also remained overwhelmingly optimistic about the long-term changes that may result from the Jasmine Revolution. Vast majorities believed that the result would be a democratic system (93.5 percent), better economic opportunities (94.9 percent), an improvement in human rights (93.9 percent), the establishment of the rule of law (92.4 percent), and greater social justice (92.5 percent).

Although Tunisians desired sweeping changes from the previous system, most attributed the cause underlying the Jasmine Revolution to economic grievances. According to 63.0 percent of the respondents, the primary cause of the uprisings was economic dissatisfaction and a further 17.9 percent identified this as the second-most important factor. The next most common reason cited was corruption within the system with 16.7 percent stating this was the most important reason and 45.4 percent stating it was the second-most important factor. By comparison, only 13.9 percent respondents stated that demands for political liberties were the most important reason for the uprisings; 28.6 percent said that they were the second-most important. Very small minorities cited other factors including the establishment of an Islamic state or ending Tunisia's pro-Western policies.

Given the nature of the grievances leading to the Jasmine Revolution, it is unsurprising that economic concerns still dominate the political arena. Nearly 70 percent of respondents stated that economic concerns such as inflation and unemployment were the most important challenge facing Tunisians. This was followed by the challenges of corruption (12.9 percent) and domestic security (7.5 percent).

By comparison, only 1.9 percent of respondents cited democratic consolidation and only 1.4 percent cited free and fair elections as being the most important challenge facing Tunisia. This finding does not indicate that Tunisians are not supportive of democracy, however. Rather, 90.0 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that democracy may have its problems, but it is the best form of government. Similarly, 98.3 percent of respondents stated that a democratic system represented a good or very good manner of governing Tunisia.

Additionally, this lack of concern about the political challenges does not appear to come from the fact that Tunisians believe the democratic transition has already been consolidated. Rather, only 28.1 percent of respondents believe that Tunisia is closer to being fully democratic than being fully authoritarian with the mean on a scale of 0 to 10 being 4.5.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Tunisians believe that some aspects associated with liberal democracy have been achieved. The vast majority (90.2 percent) stated that one could criticize the government without fear. Yet, when asked to assess the state of democracy and human rights in the country, only 26.7 percent stated that it was good or very good compared to 18.6 percent who stated it was bad or very bad. By far the most common response was that it was neither good nor bad (45.6 percent), further demonstrating that citizens believe there is still much to be achieved in the political realm.

One possible explanation for these relatively low ratings of democracy but lack of concern about political outcomes was related to how Tunisians have understood democracy. Rather than understanding it in primarily political terms, as is common in many Western liberal democracies, many Tunisians, as Arab Barometer surveys showed to be the case in other countries as well, focused on economic issues when thinking about democracy. Nearly half of Tunisians (48.3 percent) stated that the primary characteristic of democratic governance is a small income gap (21.1 percent), the provision of basic necessities for all members of society (22.4 percent), or the elimination of corruption (4.8 percent). By comparison, 27.4 percent stated that the most important characteristic is free and fair elections, 11.3 percent said that it is the ability to criticize the government, and 11.1 percent stated that it is equality of political rights among citizens.

One of the primary tasks for the newly elected constituent assembly is to devise a constitution that defines the future political system. One of the most critical decisions is to determine whether Tunisia will operate as a presidential or parliamentary system. Respondents were asked their opinion on this complex issue and, unsurprisingly, a large number stated that they did not know (21.5 percent). Of those who did offer an opinion, a majority supported a parliamentary system (52.9 percent). Only 15.4 percent indicated that they supported a presidential system similar to what existed between 1957 and the Jasmine Revolution and the remaining 32.0 percent stated that they preferred a mix of the two forms of government.

While Tunisians desired a parliamentary system, they also sought a system that is civil rather than religious in nature. Over three-quarters (76.5 percent) of respondents indicated that they supported a civil state compared to 23.5 percent who stated that they wanted a religious state.

Overall, Tunisians had strong and clear preferences about the future of their country. Support for a democratic system — broadly defined — was high and there was a general consensus that parliament should play a greater role in the political process than before. Importantly, despite Ennahda's significant victory in constituent assembly elections, the vast majority of Tunisians desired a civil state with a limited political role for Islam in the political process, although most agreed that laws should generally be consistent with sharia. As a result, Ennahda's future popularity likely depends on its commitment to remaining a moderate Islamist party.

It was also clear that Tunisians continued to have high hopes for the achievements of the ongoing political transition, although most central to these were hopes for a better economic future. Although political outcomes are also important, it is apparent based on the results of the Arab Barometer that a desire for greater economic opportunity drove the Jasmine Revolution and has continued to be the key demand of the average Tunisian. Thus, while the constituent assembly will debate the merits of different forms of representative government, it is critical that the transitional government not lose sight of economic issues and that it promote reforms that bring benefits to all sectors of society. Otherwise, regardless of the political makeup determined by the draft constitution, grievances against the system are likely to continue.

Michael Robbins is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at the University of Michigan and a former Dubai Initiative Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School. Mark Tessler is Samuel J. Eldersveld Collegiate Professor of Political Science and Vice-Provost for International Affairs at the University of Michigan.

Tunisia's student Salafis

By Monica Marks, January 6, 2012

Giggling over a communal pot of couscous, the girls swap stories and take turns pushing each other across the room on wheely chairs. Douha Rihi, 20, a German language major, wants to study abroad in Berlin. Sana Brahim, 23, is pursuing a master's degree in Microbiology. They don't look like the kind of young women you'd expect to find at the center of a major ideological controversy, but here they are — all 10 of them — perched on the second level of the university administration building, fighting for their right to wear the full Muslim face veil, called niqab, inside classrooms and during exams.

Along with a group of scraggly-bearded young Salafi men, these girls have been occupying the University of Manouba College of Arts and Humanities administration building since November 28, 2011. Their protest has resulted in the continued closure of one of Tunisia's largest campuses since December 6 and has kept an estimated 13,000 students from attending their classes.

The so-called "Salafi sit-in" has ignited impassioned debate concerning the extent to which religious expression should be tolerated in Tunisia's public sphere, particularly in traditionally secularist strongholds such as universities. What began with the demands of two students, Iman Melki, 20, and Faten Ben Mahmoud, 21, to wear the face veil during exams in late November has mushroomed into a seemingly intractable standoff between secularist university administrators and a tiny but determined group of about 50 to 60 Salafi-sympathizing youth on campus.

"At the beginning we had two demands," explains Mohamed Souli, a 21-year-old student standing sentry in front of the administration building. "We wanted a prayer room inside the university and the right of all girls to wear niqab inside classrooms and during exams. These are still our demands."

The faculty board at the University of Manouba, however, has steadfastly refused to allow niqab in classrooms or during examinations, citing a variety of security and pedagogical concerns. These concerns include the danger that students may hide weapons or cheating devices under their niqabs and the difficulty of teaching pupils whose facial expressions are concealed.

Some professors noted that the revolutionary atmosphere has inspired a wave of more vocal student demands on Tunisian campuses. "After the revolution there were so many student demands," said Faiza Derbel, an assistant professor of linguistics at the University of Manouba. "Students wanted their papers re-graded and said that their exams were too difficult. I was able to handle their problems on an individual basis. But this seems to be an unmanageable situation."

In the wake of the January 2011 revolution, Tunisians have breathed a collective sigh of relief. Ben Ali's clampdown police state has been replaced by a startlingly vibrant atmosphere of laissez-faire engagement. Students are speaking up, a raft of new non-government organizations (NGOs) and media outlets has been founded, and people are feeling comfortable experimenting with formerly suppressed modes of religious expression. Whereas Ben Ali's Ministry of Religious affairs scripted preachers' Friday sermons and distributed them to mosques across the country, local mosques are now free to preach what they wish, and Tunisians can wear headscarves, niqabs, and long beards without fear of imprisonment or government reprisal.

Unable to reach a compromise with the protesters, Habib Kazdaghli, dean of the College of Arts and Humanities, called upon the Ministry of Higher Education in early December 2011 to resolve the Salafi issue. Mr. Kazdaghli and the faculty board presented the ministry with requests to relocate the sit-inners away from the administration building and evacuate any protesters who are not registered students at the University of Manouba.

The Ministry of Higher Education, for its part, has hesitated to involve itself in the controversy, possibly afraid that sending police to forcibly remove protesters will exacerbate an already volatile situation and serve as an unwelcome reminder of the former regime's heavy handed treatment of protesters. In a statement broadcast on Tunisian radio, the newly appointed Minister of Higher Education, Moncef Ben Salem, reiterated that the sit-in is "an internal affair" and that police will not enter the university.

At the point when the sit-in exceeded a month, a group of about 200 anti-niqab demonstrators, fed up with the sit-in, gathered in front of the Ministry of Higher Education. The group, comprised mainly of professors and students from the University of Manouba, called for immediate government intervention to disperse the Salafi protesters and restore security on the Manouba campus.

Many professors at the University of Manouba are incensed at the ministry's lack of involvement and have joined in the anti-niqab protest. "We needed a categorical answer — either these Salafi sit-inners go or we stay. That's why we came here today," said Amel Grami, a lecturer in gender and Islamic studies.

Ms. Grami and a number of other female professors reported being verbally harassed by the Salafi students in early December, and Mr. Kazdaghli was pushed and physically prevented from entering his office in the administration building on December 6. In a report issued on December 9, Human Rights Watch called on the Tunisian government to "ensure swift intervention of security forces whenever requested by the faculty to prevent third parties from seriously disrupting academic life."

The niqab dispute at Manouba has acquired a politically polarized and ideological tone. Ms. Grami, like many of the professors at the anti-nijab demonstration, places much of the blame for the Salafis' rise squarely on the shoulders of Ennahda, the center-right Islamist party that won a plurality of the vote in the October 2011 elections. "At the end of the day, this is Rached Ghannouchi's decision," said Ms. Grami, pushing her black bangs away from her sunglasses. "Ennahda has created an environment where these people feel comfortable imposing their will on us."

Said Ferjani, an official spokesperson for Ennahda Party, said that Manouba must find a solution to the niqab dispute "without infringing in any shape or form on a woman's fundamental right to choose her own clothing." The niqab debate and controversy over

women wearing skimpy bikinis on Tunisian beaches, Mr. Ferjani said, "are two sides of the same issue. We live within the dynamics of a fledgling democracy, and we must respect democratic principles."

For some students, the standoff at Manouba represents little more than a frustratingly alarmist tug of war over largely irrelevant issues of "Tunisian identity." "We, the students, are the losers," said Houda, a head-scarved 21-year-old who attended yesterday's anti-niqab demonstration purely out of curiosity. "We want to return to our studies without thinking of any ideology. These girls who wear niqab are just as Tunisian as all the people here."

The faculty board at Manouba, however, seems unlikely to budge. Other universities around the country, in Sfax, Sousse, Ariana, and Kariouane, have dealt with similar instances of girls wearing niqab to class. Some have found creative compromises to end the standoff. According to members of the Manouba faculty board, the dean of April 9th University in Tunis solved his university's niqab crisis by offering the three girls wearing niqab the option of taking their exams in a classroom with blind students and a female invigilator. They accepted his offer, and things appear to be running smoothly.

Many professors at Manouba, however, feel their university has a special role to play as a key holdout — a fortress of secular enlightenment, so to speak, in a nation that is backsliding into the recesses of Saudi-style Salafism. "We are ashamed of what happened at April 9th," said Nabil Cherni, a lecturer in English at the University of Manouba. "Our position is uncompromising."

Meanwhile, back at the administration building, the bearded boys have taken a break from playing football to roll out large green floor mats for the sunset prayer. It seems they're taking delight in "protecting" the niqabbed young ladies upstairs and they make sure to register my name and contact information before I walk up to meet the girls. I ask Mohamed Souli what the boys would do if the security forces came to physically expel the sit-inners from their building. "We will resist and try to be tolerant," he says, "but if police use violence we will respond. Our only protector is Allah, and we're serving him."

Later, sharing dates with the niqabbed girls upstairs, I ask Ms. Melki what has motivated her to spend 37 days in a chilly upstairs administration room. "Every girl has the liberty to wear whatever she wants," she proclaims. "This is a university and we are free." Then she stands up, lowers her face veil, and carries a pot of food down to the boys.

Ennahda's re-election strategy

By Erik Churchill, March 27, 2012

Less than six months after the country's first democratic elections and only four months into the government's mandate, Tunisia's ruling party, Ennahda, announced its intentions to hold the country's next elections in March 2013. The announcement came as a surprise as some thought the government was set on taking its time, while others questioned how a government that has only just begun writing a constitution could plan for elections. Although some parties in the constituent assembly have dissented from the announcement, with Ennahda's backing, it will likely proceed as announced.

While outside the country Tunisia's successful elections and relatively peaceful transition have been praised, Tunisians have been more skeptical. Many have criticized the government's slow pace and opposition parties have capitalized on the perceived inaction by the government on the economy and security situation. The electoral timetable, along with the budget released by the government,

are both tactical and strategic. The timetable will ward off criticism of its intentions to hold power indefinitely and the deadline will set the pace for constitution writing within the year. The budget-busting spending will aim to curry favor among voters, who are eager to see tangible material benefits from their historic uprising. Together, one begins to see the foundations for Ennahda's electoral strategy.

The announcement of the timetable was most welcome and a relief to those who feared the government would try to preserve its mandate indefinitely. Despite that the timetable exceeds the one-year limit that had been agreed upon by a coalition of parties, including Ennahda, in September 2011, it will allow all political parties to focus on their electoral strategies, their potential weaknesses, and areas they will want to exploit for electoral gain in March 2013.

For Ennahda, its strategy approaching elections is coming into focus. It is based on three principles — spend big, marginalize opponents, and blame others for failures.

During the elections for the constituent assembly, Ennahda promised to turn around Tunisia's economy, however, it has struggled in its first few months to hold true to those commitments. The ruling party is attempting to change that with its new budget, which proposes a massive 10 percent increase in government expenditures. Based on rosy projections of increased tax receipts and tracking down and selling off Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's assets, the budget increases development spending, in particular, by 23 percent. Economists (and international institutions like the World Bank) have supported increased development spending, particularly for rural areas. Whereas the World Bank has advocated long-term structural changes to the economy, the 2012 budget makes it clear that Ennahda will look to disburse these development funds as quickly as possible.

This poses risks, however, particularly with Tunisia's creditors. While the United States and Qatar have recently supported a Tunisian bond auction, ratings agencies were concerned over Tunisia's budget deficit of 3.7 percent in 2011. With the deficit expected to balloon to over 6.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2012, the country, and its fragile banking sector, may be subject to increasing speculation about its long-term financial stability.

A second tactic Ennahda seems intent on employing is the characterization of its opponents as extremists. The party aims to project itself as the guarantor of Tunisia's moderate center, while at the same time pushing the center to the right. Recent statements by Ennahda's leadership group "fundamentalist" and "extreme" secularists with radical Islamist groups. This is an interesting strategy because it co-opts the language used by the regimes of Habib Bourguiba and Ben Ali that described the government as the guarantor of a certain Tunisian moderation. It also shows opponents of the regime as not only divisive, but also dangerous.

This is a strategy fraught with risks. It opens the doors for political speech to much more extreme language. In reality, Ennahda's reverence for a civil state and modern, democratic institutions is quite similar to the secularists'. This vision differs from radical Salafist parties, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, that advocate for a rejection of democracy and a return to a caliphate. By using the language of extremism, Ennahda is equating a party like the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), a moderate left wing group, with the Hizb ut-Tahrir. This is an absurd comparison. Ennahda and its secular opponents have much more in common with each other than with Hizb ut-Tahrir. But by characterizing its secular opponents as extremists, Ennahda looks like the party that is trying to divide Tunisia into two — not the other way around.

In contrast to the marginalization of the left, Ennahda is employing a "light touch" when dealing with fundamentalist conservative parties. Many Tunisians have been shocked to see images of Salafist groups tearing down the Tunisian flag at Manouba University or climbing the historic clock tower on Bourguiba Avenue to wave Salafist flags. To the consternation of many, Ennahda has preferred to let these groups participate in public life, and have sometimes even supported their positions — such as guaranteeing the rights of women who wear the full face veil. While the Ennahda-led government has spoken out against the dangers of violent jihadism, it prefers to engage the far right, rather than push them underground.

A third strategy utilized by Ennahda is to blame its opponents for any challenges. For example, the government revised down its GDP forecasts because of ongoing labor unrest. This is undoubtedly an important factor in Tunisia's economic situation, but it is certainly not the only one. The instability with the country's major trading partner, Libya, the debt crisis in Europe, and problems with security also play into the equation. The Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), the country's leading trade union, and other critics of the government, however, remain the best scapegoats for Ennahda. Likewise, the government often blames violence on rogue elements of the former regime accusing them of trying to destabilize the government. Meanwhile, Ennahda fails to address whether the government is adequately responding to the security situation.

Ennahda's strategy is not just a Machiavellian calculation to retain power; it is also due to the corner they have been painted into by their opponents. For decades Ennahda has been labeled an extremist party, despite all efforts to throw off the label — including 20 years of statements by the movement's leader, Rached Ghannouchi. The party seems to have finally realized that it is more advantageous to use extremist terminology on its opponents than to fight it. The same is true for the economic situation. Before the new government even took power critics were blaming the party for indecision and inaction on the economy. While Ennahda's strategy is political and often mischaracterizes its opponents, the party is playing by the electoral rules.

The electoral timetable announcement and the agreement to reinstate the electoral commission, the Independent High Authority for the Elections (ISIE), are positive steps. Ennahda has done the country a service in setting out a clear path. It is in the driver's seat for the months leading up to March 2013 and it will be an interesting ride to see how Ennahda campaigns and whether its opponents can find a counter-attack against what remains a very popular movement.

Erik Churchill is an analyst and development consultant based in Tunisia. He blogs about Tunisian politics at Kefteji.


الشباب هم قادة الغد وأمل المستق
وعلى أكتافهم تقام حضارات، وترفع
قاعة العروض

Chapter 4

EGYPT

Egypt's cobra and mongoose

By Robert Springborg, Feburary 27, 2012

The deadly struggle for power between Egypt's rulers and the Muslim Brothers dates back to the rule of King Faruq, with each episode following virtually the identical script. Each time, for a brief period ruler and Brothers "cohabit," but the marriage of convenience soon breaks down amidst mutual recrimination. The ruler, recently arrived on the monarchial or presidential throne, reaches out to the Brothers to benefit from or at least neutralize the political support they command. For their part the Brothers seek purchase within the state to ward off threats, obtain resources, and gain footholds from which they may commence their final ascent to power. But this cooperation will not last, to judge by history — a history well known to all players in today's unfolding story.

In the case of King Faruq, the Brothers overreached with a campaign of assassination, which provoked a counter-campaign that included the killing of the movement's founder-leader Hassan al-Banna, and a general crackdown on the movement. In the case of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the new regime went so far as to provide the Brothers a cabinet seat before using an alleged assassination attempt on Nasser almost two years on to launch the campaign of terror against them that lasted virtually until the end of his life. For his part, Anwar Sadat reached out to the Brothers to fill the political vacuum resulting from his purge of leftist Nasserists only months after becoming president. For several years they enjoyed his patronage and protection, before falling victim to his fear and megalomania.

Hosni Mubarak followed a similar script when he replaced the assassinated Sadat, re-opening political space for the Brothers in the first years of his long rule, before settling on a formula in the 1990s that sharply constrained but did not eliminate their political presence. For years, Mubarak tolerated, and indeed benefited from, this limited presence. But like his predecessors, Mubarak ultimately tightened the screws on the Brotherhood further, seeking vainly in the final years of his presidency to destroy their economic and political base through an escalated campaign of arrests and repression.

The history of relations between modern Egyptian rulers and the Muslim Brotherhood has played out again and again in the same manner of the epic clash between the mongoose and cobra, with the former always winning. Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi and his fellow generals on the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) are of course well aware of this history. Their behavior suggests that they too want to benefit from the Brotherhood's political support during a transitional period. But almost as farce, history seems destined to repeat itself. The rivalry inherent in the relationship renders political cohabitation difficult to the point of being impossible, so the military mongoose can be expected to strike at the Brotherhood cobra yet again. But this time the outcome may be quite different.

The comparative evidence of relations in other authoritarian regimes between a ruling military and religiously based opposition parties is not as one-sided as the mongoose-cobra analogy implies. While General Franco and his military came to dominate all of Spain, including the Catholic church and its right wing political arm, Opus Dei, fascism elsewhere in Europe, including in Germany and Italy, saw the party, at least partially supported by the church, ascendant over the military. In Latin America the military generally had the upper hand until democratic transitions subordinated it to institutional control. In Iran, however, the mullahs appear still to have the upper hand against both the regular military and the Revolutionary Guard Corps they created as a counterbalance to it. These battles do not inevitably result in the army subordinating the party.

Nor do the specifics of the current SCAF-Brotherhood political cohabitation suggest that history will necessarily repeat itself. The SCAF is playing a clumsy political game that may backfire. As a scheduled transition to civilian rule looms, the military is busily trying to draw redlines behind which of its interests will remain inviolable. But that effort has undermined its political support and brought into question the very exercise. Over the long haul the military will be hard pressed to defend the lines it has drawn in the face of a contentious political arena and energized the Egyptian public. Demands will intensify for scrutiny of its budget, its internal management, and for it to at least share responsibility for making national security policies.

One possibility is that a cabal of officers, perhaps of a pan-Arabist neo-Nasserist persuasion, could decide that the SCAF, the Brothers, the "revolutionaries," and indeed everyone else had made such a political mess of things since February 11, 2011, that they needed to intervene to save the nation. But in today's Egypt, they would be hard put to assert themselves over the newly empowered Brothers and fellow traveling Islamists. In none of the historic episodes did the Brothers seek to mobilize their supporters in the street against the state. But this time, after the events in 2011, no one could be guaranteed of such reticence now that they have finally arrived almost at the seat of power.

The underlying political economy of the military-Brotherhood cohabitation similarly seems to favor the latter. The current division of the political system gives the military and Brothers control over the "hard" and "soft" states, respectively. The former now encompasses all of the armed forces, including the security and intelligence services as well as the police, plus provincial governorships and heads of provincial, district, and local executive councils. The potentially threatening position of chair of

the parliamentary national security and defense committee was awarded by the Brothers to a former general, signaling their acquiescence to the military in this potentially key domain. The "hard" cabinet portfolios of defense, military production, interior, foreign policy, finance, and international cooperation are presently all in the hands of SCAF loyalists, where they are likely to remain in the first independent government to be formed later in 2012. On paper the military looks to be in an unassailable position.

But the Brotherhood's hold on the soft state and its political influence more broadly is far from trivial. The parliament which it dominates will have greater power than at any time since the first following nominal independence in 1923. While the Brotherhood is unlikely to institutionalize that power in an elected body that it cannot be certain to control in the future, its leaders will be able to threaten to deploy parliament's latent powers to enhance their leverage. Assuming that they perform as well in local government elections as they have in parliamentary ones, the same will hold true in the governorates, districts, and municipalities. Councils at these levels will be able to contest for power with their executive branch equivalents. The Brothers' domination of professional syndicates and strong influence within the judiciary, as evidenced by their present role in the Judge's Club and Supreme Council of the Judiciary, provide additional bases upon which they can build political power. While the constitution is yet to be written, it is widely assumed that it will establish a system in which considerable executive power is transferred to the legislative branch. The betting now is that the president will be a compromise candidate between the SCAF and the Brotherhood, thereby ensuring that this key figure cannot be a complete tool of either.

The Brothers are likely to attempt to begin to move against the armed forces simultaneously from the bottom and the top. The police on the beat, already deeply unpopular and demoralized, are going to find it very hard to push back against the Brothers, who have real power on the streets. Many police are likely to begin to find common cause with them. The same will be true, although in lesser degree, of military and security service conscripts, especially in the central security force of the ministry of interior. From the top down the Brothers undoubtedly already have supporters within the various corps of officers, which they will seek to bolster. The potential for a bandwagon effect is certainly there, as careerists in the armed forces and those just serving their terms of conscription perceive that it is better for them to get with the coming strength rather than to be swept away in the ebb tide associated with the ousted regime and its officer legacy. So while the Brothers only dominate the soft state at present, it already provides a weighty counterbalance to the hard state, the control of which by the military will be challenged in the coming years.

The economic system is similarly, although not yet as sharply divided into hard and soft components, but likely soon to be more so. The military economy includes consumer goods and services, but its principal concentration is in heavier industry. That tendency will probably be reinforced as the generals lay claim to assets seized from Gamal Mubarak's cronies, most notably those in iron and steel and other areas of energy intensive production. The Brothers' economic activities, such as those run by Deputy Supreme Guide Khairat el-Shater or businessman Safwan Sabit, are almost entirely in consumer goods and services, including retail shops, restaurants, food processing, household furniture, and the like. They also have interests in formal and informal financial institutions.

As is the case with regard to politics, while at first glance controlling the hard economy seems to be an advantage for the military, over the longer haul controlling its soft components may give the Brothers the upper hand. Given the size and rate of growth of the population, consumer demand is bound to expand, thereby advantaging providers of consumer goods and services. And as important as economic advantage will be the direct contact between Brotherhood controlled companies and the public and the possibilities that provides for general reputational enhancement, resource accumulation, and recruitment. In addition, the Brotherhood will move to expand its existing social safety net and will draw upon state resources to do so, lest the appeal of the Salafis among the poor, as demonstrated in the parliamentary elections, become a serious political threat. This too will serve to reinforce its political standing and extend its reach.

Another economic consideration is the Brothers' ability to tap resources from the Gulf. While the Mubarak regime was kept on drip feed from Gulf sources and the SCAF has yet to obtain really major contributions from those sources, the Brothers' prospects are considerably brighter. Various of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have already demonstrated an interest in investing in the Brotherhood's political futures and as they brighten, more investors are likely to follow, whether through direct subventions,

investments in businesses, or public assistance to the state. Finally, the expansion of the Islamic economy, as suggested already by the promised floating of a $2 billion sukuk (Islamic bond) issue, not only will provide another bridge to the Gulf, it will bolster the standing of the Brothers as competent and moral economic managers and as gatekeepers and stimulators of this flow of funds. By comparison, the military's hold over capital intensive factories producing military and intermediate goods will provide them few directly political advantages, either at home or in the region.

The comparative advantage of the Brotherhood over the military has already been displayed in the area of foreign policy. In a move of near desperation as it saw its support ebbing away, the SCAF launched an attack on the United States, using the issue of U.S. funding to Egyptian NGOs to do so. This not only bit the hand that feeds the military, it stimulated anti-Americanism and anti-westernism more generally, a tendency that is a threat to the military's interest and a boon to the Brothers'. Now that this whole subject has been opened, it can be manipulated almost at will by those who will benefit from chauvinism, which over the longer haul will assuredly be the Brothers, not the military.

The present cohabitation of the military and the Brotherhood, based as it is on the transient supremacy of the former, is therefore inherently unstable. A preemptive strike by the generals, or even by a colonel, as was done in the past, would be unlikely to succeed this time around. And failing such a strike, time is on the side of the Brothers. This time, they will be the victorious mongoose and the military the defeated cobra. Egypt is thus at a historic turning point as profound as when the republican era replaced the colonial one. Will they try to directly control the cobra they have defeated, or will they seek instead to subject that military to institutional control within an at least quasi-democratic polity? In other words, will they opt for an Iranian style system of control of the armed forces, thereby converting them into a base for their own power, or will they chose instead to depoliticize the military, thus making democracy possible? Here, finally, neither history, nor the mongoose metaphor, offers us lessons.

Robert Springborg is a professor in the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the Department of Defense or the U.S. government.

Will Slow and Steady Win the Race?

By Nathan Brown, February 28, 2011

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood has just declared that it would form a political party — it settled on a name (Freedom and Justice) and asked one of its leaders (Sa`d al-Katatni) to oversee the effort. Since its founding more than eight decades ago, the Brotherhood has never been able to take such a step. What should those who care about Egypt's future look for in this party?

In the early days of the Egyptian revolution, international attention seized on whether the Brotherhood would move immediately to "hijack" the revolution. But the Brotherhood is a cautious and deliberate actor less likely to seize anything tomorrow but very careful about its long-term positioning. Just as it declared it would form a party, for instance, it also rejected any idea of applying for recognition under the current legal framework. If it is not an impetuous actor, it still seems to be an imposing one — indeed, it is often described as the "best organized" of all political forces in Egypt. And indeed, if a democratic order does emerge in Egypt, the Brotherhood party will be an important actor. But the transition may be a bit more difficult for the Brotherhood than many observers anticipate.

Muslim Brotherhood movements pride themselves on being simultaneously principled and practical; they hold fast to their general beliefs but insist they are flexible in application. Indeed, part of the motivation to establish a party is to allow a group of leaders within the movement to develop the specialized skills and structures to take full advantage of political opportunities. But the challenge of political activity is that it can force a choice, at least in the short term, between their strategic vision and their tactical calculations. If kept far from power, they can finesse the gap between ideology and reality. When they play partisan politics on a daily basis that becomes harder.

Part of the challenge for the Brotherhood will be to convert selected parts of a movement with a broad social, religious, and political set of agendas into a more narrowly focused political party. And another part (as I have argued elsewhere) will be to enter a political field that will be far more crowded in a society that is much more politically conscious — and populated now by hardened and experienced political organizers — than it has known in the past.

Brotherhood movements are large and broad enough to seek to be many things to many people. In February 2011, I sat in the living room of a senior Hamas leader in the West Bank. He argued forcefully that Israel was illegitimate and explained that while an Islamic state would hardly slaughter the Jews and instead let them live in peace, there was no other solution than an Islamic one to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His son, sitting next to him, listened respectfully but then said, "What my father said is completely correct from a religious point of view. However, from a political point of view, Hamas accepts a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders." When he finished, his father nodded as if in agreement. They both looked at me as if Hamas was being perfectly clear. And, in its own way, it was. Both religious and political logic could be right — for now. Hamas can be militant and compromising at the same time as long as it does not have to make a decision. Other Muslim Brotherhood movements are like Hamas — with their broad members, wide range of interests, and deep social and political engagement that can thrive on ambiguity.

And in that one limited but real sense, Egypt's authoritarian political order has thus been kind to a Brotherhood movement by allowing it to live in the grey zones. Those days may be numbered. Hard decisions will have to be taken soon. The Brotherhood will not rush into any of them, but it cannot avoid them forever. How can those interested in the Brotherhood understand what direction it is taking? What are the choices that it will have to make? Let me turn to three important questions: what, who, and how.

What will it stand for? In 2007, the Brotherhood drafted an extremely detailed platform in preparation for forming a political party. While there was no prospect of gaining legal status any time soon, the Brotherhood wished to begin to prepare for any opening that might develop, resolve some internal arguments, and communicate to external audiences that it had a comprehensive political vision. The goals were not realized: the draft platform was never finalized but it sparked tremendous controversy both within the movement and outside of it. Later that year, when the regime effectively embedded the ban on a Brotherhood party into the constitution, the leadership put the brakes on the project — there was no point in sparking divisions or courting controversy for the sake of a party any time soon; as the head of the Brotherhood's parliamentary bloc told me in 2010, the feeling was that if the Brotherhood actually attempted to form a party at that time, it would be tantamount to signing its own death warrant.

That is obviously no longer the case, and the Brotherhood leadership has therefore indicated that it will dust off the platform and nail down the outstanding details. While the platform ran to more than 100 pages, much of the debate focused on two articles — one that favored limiting high state positions to Muslim males and another that proposed that Egyptian religious scholars elect a body that would have the authority to review legislation and measure it against the Islamic sharia.

In reviving the project, indications are that the second proposal has been dropped. (The idea of having religious scholars elect their own leadership rather than have the government appoint them is gaining traction outside of the Brotherhood and was probably the main thrust of the original Brotherhood proposal; leaders seem to have been taken aback by the vociferous criticisms of the draft platform's further suggestion of allowing such a body veto power over legislation and dropped the idea). On the restrictions on high state positions, retreat has been more limited: the Brotherhood is insisting on its position but seems to be limiting its focus for the ban on non-Muslims and women to the presidency alone. But it is also attempting to finesse the debate by explaining that while the

movement itself would not support a Christian or a woman candidate running for the office, it would not reject the legitimacy of anyone who was elected to the post in accordance with constitutional provisions. Indeed, that was where the debate was suspended in 2007, and in the intervening years, there appears to have been little change.

But perhaps most frustrating for the Brotherhood was that the rest of their program was ignored in that earlier debate. By presenting itself as the potential party of "freedom" and "justice" it seeks to revive the idea that its conception of an Islamic agenda is not just about narrow religious strictures but also about broad social, economic and political reform.

Who will lead it? The Brotherhood's choice of Sa`d al-Katatni to lead the effort is highly suggestive. Katatni has been identified variously as both a conservative and a pragmatist. (My vague impression is that the former description may be more accurate but is less than useful, since he is not strongly identified with any particular set of positions.) More significant than his private thoughts are his public and institutional positions. First, Katatni was the leader of the parliamentary bloc from 2005 to 2010. He seems to have been selected for his political skills and he has certainly demonstrated them in recent years. While far from charismatic, he comes across as gentle and conciliatory in tone as well as honest and thoughtful. With a solid reputation inside the movement, Katatni is also the kind of figure that other political leaders would find easier to deal with. He will set few crowds on fire but will reassure many who are suspicious of the movement. In that sense, his selection can be taken as an indication that the Brotherhood is serious about playing politics in a pluralist environment.

But Katatni is also a member of the movement's guidance bureau, the highest decision-making body in the organization. His selection suggests the party will have a gentle face but also a short leash, at least for the moment; the movement wishes to keep a very close eye on the development of the party. And that leads to the third question about the Brotherhood party.

How will it be organized? The subject of the relationship between the movement and any potential party has been a subject of internal discussion for years; in past meetings with the designated founder, I had the impression that Katatni personally wished to see a party that had considerable autonomy in day-to-day decision making but was still anchored firmly in the Brotherhood vision.

Mindful that his designation sent the signal that the Brotherhood might seek to control the party, Katatni insisted that his mission is a temporary one to get the party off the ground; after that point, its membership will select the leader and guide the party's direction. And one newspaper account attributed to him the statement that if a permanent leader came from the guidance bureau, he should resign that position.

That suggests a far more autonomous body, free to take positions, make compromises, and forge alliances with more of an eye to the short-term exigencies of electoral and parliamentary politics. An autonomous Islamist party could still take strong positions likely to antagonize less religious forces (especially if it saw such positions as likely to pay off in electoral terms), but it would still be far easier to integrate as a political actor because it would be operating according to a political logic. Morocco's Justice and Development Party (PJD) and Turkey's AKP are sometimes cited as examples of such parties. But Jordan's Islamic Action Front is an example of how formal autonomy can be undermined by closely overlapping structures: in Jordan, because the same individuals move back and forth between movement and party positions, it becomes very difficult to discern where the organizations are distinct. The party's ability to escape micromanagement from the movement is limited.

Up to this point, therefore, the Brotherhood has been able to keep to its past patterns of living in ambiguity. It has suggested a broad reform agenda but also kept firm hold of some positions that disturb more liberal political forces; it has selected a conciliatory figure to head the movement but given very mixed signals indeed on the shape that the future organization will take.

The movement will likely not decide these matters more definitively before it has to do so. But if a true transition takes place in Egypt, the hurly-burly of daily politics will soon require Brotherhood leaders to make up their minds.

Nathan Brown is a professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University.

Sectarianism Stalks Egypt

By Michael Wahid Hanna May 9, 2011

Egypt was once again the scene of sectarian conflict when an angry mob gathered in front of a Coptic church in Cairo on the night of May 7, 2011, in the false belief that a Christian convert to Islam was being held against her will, setting off hours of fighting in the streets. The incident, in the poor working-class Cairo district of Imbaba, resulted in the deaths of 12, six Muslims and six Copts, with more than 200 wounded and two churches burnt. The identity of the perpetrators and instigators remains to be determined. What is clear, however, is that this incident of sectarian strife has deep roots in recent Egyptian history, and raises the specter of broader communal violence. Coming at a delicate moment during Egypt's transition toward multiparty elections, it also represents a clarifying moment for the Muslim Brotherhood and a vital test for Egypt's emerging democratic order. Egypt's latest descent into sectarian madness is ultimately a reflection of longstanding discrimination against Copts and the unchecked climate of religious intolerance that has increasingly come to mark Egyptian society. How the evolving political system deals with these issues may be the most urgent test of how much Egypt has actually changed since the fall of Hosni Mubarak.

The 2010 New Year's Eve bombing of the Two Saints Church in Alexandria brought millions of Egyptians, both Muslims and Copts, out into the streets to protest the wanton violence directed at a Christian house of worship. The attack was one more indictment of the sclerotic regime of former President Hosni Mubarak. The scenes of cross-sectarian solidarity that ensued helped galvanize popular sentiments and influenced the trajectory and tenor of Egypt's unprecedented popular uprising which began on January 25, 2011. A common sentiment linking public outrage was that this was not the Egypt that many Egyptians knew — sectarian violence of this sort was what happened in Lebanon or Iraq, but Egypt was different, and the faiths lived side by side harmoniously. But, in fact, sectarianism and bigotry are a part of Egypt, as is the attendant denial that has underplayed these growing trends. There are reasonable suspicions that sectarian tensions are now being manipulated for political ends by members of the former regime. The role of the state in fostering the sectarian divide was reinforced for many when the former minister of interior, Habib al-Adly, was accused formally of orchestrating the Alexandria church bombing. How the state now responds will answer lingering questions about the extent of its transformation.

Since the toppling of the Mubarak regime, the reality of the country's sectarian divide has been on display with escalating tensions and more frequent acts of violence directed at Egypt's Christian minority, the largest non-Muslim religious minority in the Arab world. This violence has been particularly disappointing when contrasted with the scenes of communal solidarity that marked Egypt's 18-day uprising. The profusion of the crescent and cross intertwined on protest banners harkened back to Egypt's 1919 Revolution when Copts and Muslims joined forces against British imperialism and an ineffectual monarch under the banner "Religion is for God and the Nation is for All." The broad-based, disciplined, and self-conscious efforts by protesters to eschew nakedly sectarian slogans were a heartening development that many interpreted as a first step toward the building of a new social compact for an inclusive civil state. In Tahrir Square and other locales of protest throughout Egypt, one often heard the chant of "Muslims and Christians are One Hand." Conscious of their surroundings and wider audiences, individuals sought to give such sentiments vitality through actions, such as the now iconic pictures of Christians forming a human barrier to protect praying Muslims in Tahrir Square and other scenes where Muslims took the lead in protecting their fellow Christian citizens in acts of public prayer.

Many Copts were initially wary of the uprising and feared the possibility of the further Islamization of the Egyptian state, reflecting their increased marginalization within Egyptian society in recent decades. In keeping with regional trends, particularly following the crushing defeat in the June 1967 War against Israel, Egypt had undergone a religious revival and retrenchment that touched all aspects of its public life and helped popularize notions of political Islam. While Egypt's authoritarian leaders often repressed Islamist opposition forces, they also sought to protect the state from such challenges by indulging public religiosity, co-opting many Islamist demands, and shifting support among Islamist groups to combat the rise of others. This legacy of polarization gained increased prominence under the negligent watch of the Mubarak regime, which had long manipulated sectarian issues to pacify Egypt's Christians, ensure their fealty to the regime, and paralyze efforts at cross-sectarian political mobilization. Increased social atomization also suited the interests of the Coptic Church hierarchy, whose authority was reinforced in a manner akin to the Ottoman millet system, whereby the church was granted wide communal authorities and was the primary interlocutor with governmental organs.

The attacks in Imbaba were preceded by several other post-uprising incidents of sectarian strife. While details remain murky and confusion reigns as to the precipitating causes of these events, many have sought to explain these outbursts as a manifestation of counter-revolutionary forces that are seeking to halt the progress of Egypt's revolution. In this telling, shadowy forces associated with the ancient régime seek to restore its foundations by creating chaos, sowing fear, and laying the groundwork for a crackdown on dissent and protest by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the military body has ruled the country during the period of transition. The possibility that former regime figures are exploiting Egypt's security vacuum and ongoing instability to further their narrow self-interests is real, but there is little tangible evidence at this point to buttress such allegations. However, past practice does point to this possibility, as the elements of the former regime sought to create a security vacuum in the opening stages of the Egyptian uprising, in an effort to provoke a popular backlash against the protest movement.

Others have pointed to the sudden public emergence of Salafism as a force within Egyptian society. While labeling others as Salafis has become an overly-broad method for describing extremist religious currents, many self-declared Salafis, who previously shunned political life, have sought a role for themselves in Egypt's tumultuous political transition. The Salafis are not a monolithic entity, and some Salafi leaders have sought to distance their groups from incitement and violence against Copts. However, other Salafist leaders have actively sought to exploit sectarianism and have latched onto unfounded allegations against the church and its aging Patriarch, Shenouda III (since deceased – *ed.*). Salafi incitement to intolerance is now a disquieting aspect of Egyptian public life. In this period of confusion and paranoia, the Salafis have also come to be seen by some as the tip of the counter-revolutionary spear and a concrete manifestation of Saudi intolerance for Egypt's revolutionary moment. Current Salafi trends are often linked with Wahhabi-style religious practice and Saudi proselytizing, and, as a result, popular suspicions have quickly developed that Saudi Arabia is backing Salafist groups as a move against revolutionary change in Egypt.

The emergence of the Salafist current poses a serious test for the Muslim Brotherhood as they seek to normalize their political existence. While the Brotherhood is not responsible in any way for the attacks on Copts and has denounced such actions publicly, as the most significant political force calling for religion in the public arena, they have a heightened responsibility to act proactively against these abuses of religious sentiment that now threaten to destroy Egypt's social fabric. Moreover, at a time when the Brotherhood's intentions are being questioned by other opposition forces, they have an additional responsibility to increase public trust. Much of this distrust has been fuelled by their public dalliance with the Salafis, which most recently took the form of a massive joint public rally. As sectarianism threatens to undermine the stability of the transition period, the organization at times appeared to be more concerned with contesting the parliamentary elections and protecting its flank from Salafi encroachment.

The political participation of the Muslim Brotherhood is a critical and necessary step for Egypt and the Arab world beyond the unsustainable and counterproductive repression that has characterized the Egyptian state's relationship to the country's largest organized opposition force. However, if the Brotherhood expects to be treated as a responsible political actor in Egypt's new political order, they should be called to account for these actions, and they should clarify their own red lines with respect to cooperation with Salafi forces. The Brotherhood should understand that perceptions of the group by secular Egyptians and within the international community will be shaped by its response to these developments. At a moment of national peril, the Brotherhood and the emerging

political actors across the spectrum will have to take time from their organizational and electoral efforts to stem this tide of social unrest. Egypt's preeminent Islamic religious institution, al-Azhar University, should also take a greater public lead in combating rising tensions. Egypt's Coptic community will have to act with discipline and ensure that it does not further the sectarian divide, whether through rhetoric or actions. In this vein, misguided and self-defeating calls for international protection, even if only made by fringe groups in Egypt or the diaspora, will only further fuel sectarian narratives that regard Egypt's Christians as a suspect fifth column. Similarly, Copts should not evince nostalgia for the purported stability of the former regime, as the existing sectarian divide was cultivated and manipulated by that regime for its own ends.

The provenance of the current wave of anti-Christian sentiment is now a matter that should be dealt with by Egypt's civilian judiciary. But regardless of the identity of the instigators, the ability of sectarian and bigoted narratives to instigate public unrest should be another reminder of the seriousness of Egypt's sectarian divide. As the incidents have piled up, it is no longer enough for Egyptians to voice their shock and bewilderment following each successive attack. The current course, taken to its extremes, represents the unthinkable path to civil strife and conflict. At this moment of hope and opportunity in the Arab world, the example of Egypt remains critical, and the country's fate will help shape the emerging regional order. The autocrats of the Arab world will no doubt happily use the example of Egypt to justify the continuation of their repressive order if Egypt's transition now falls prey to the forces of sectarianism and extremism.

Michael Wahid Hanna is a fellow and program officer at the Century Foundation.

Egypt's Democratic Jihadists?

By Omar Ashour, July 13, 2011

"We were not in love with combat...if there was a way to hold a government accountable, Sadat would probably be alive today...we didn't know another way to change things." That is how the Jihadist icon Abbud al-Zumur, a former leader of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri's al-Jihad Organization, recently explained the most famous assassination in modern Egyptian history. Zumur is currently an elected member of the Consultative Council of the Egyptian Islamic Group (IG). Until March 2011, he was also the most famous political prisoner in Egypt.

Zumur was one of the eight IG leaders who signed a unilateral ceasefire declaration in July 1997. The Initiative for Ceasing Violence ultimately transformed into a comprehensive process of abandoning and de-legitimating armed activism against political enemies. Zumur was the only one of the eight signatories who was not released from prison. While he agreed to abandon political violence, he did not agree to stop vocally opposing Hosni Mubarak. His commitment to political opposition, combined with a principled rejection of violence, represents the current face of Egypt's Islamic Group as it faces a rapidly transforming Egypt.

Egypt's Islamic Group was the largest armed Islamist organization in the country and second largest in the region, after the now defunct Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA). The estimated number of the IG members is somewhere between 15,000 to 25,000 men. During its Jihadist phase, the IG operated in more than a dozen countries. In armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya; in training camps in Pakistan and Sudan; in assassination attempts in Ethiopia; in bombings in Croatia and the United States, and in a five-year insurgency in Egypt, the name of the IG usually came to the fore.

In its post-Jihadist phase, the IG abandoned violence, strongly criticized al Qaeda's behavior and strategies, and accepted participating in elections. Now, it lies on the right of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) when it comes to social conservatism and constitutional liberalism. For example, the IG still categorically denies the right of Copts and women to run for presidency (the MB does not deny that right, but says it will not support any female or Coptic candidates). When it comes to the Salafis, there are more similarities. The IG is Salafist in religious doctrine, though its relationship with mainstream political and apolitical Salafis was quite tense in the past.

The IG entered the post-Mubarak period with some serious credibility problems. The head of the IG's Consultative Council, Karam Zuhdi, and his deputy, Nagih Ibrahim, did not only call on Islamists to abandon politics, but also declared that any opposition to Mubarak and his son was futile. "Those guys became a mouthpiece for the interior ministry," a leading figure in the Muslim Brotherhood said. He was not too far off. The position of some of the IG leaders between 2003 and 2011 was quite close to that of the regime, especially when it came to criticizing other Islamists, like the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and Hezbollah. Traumatized by the experiences in Mubarak's jails and estimating that he would survive, both Zuhdi and Ibrahim supported the dictator until his last days in power.

This was not the case with the IG mid-ranks and grassroots. Most of the ones I spoke to described the position of the leadership during the revolution as a disgrace. "They told us it is illegitimate to join the revolution...we disobeyed them...now they want to jump [capitalize] on the blood of the martyrs" said a former member of the dismantled armed wing. "The relationship between the leadership and the members was always characterized by strong emotional ties and solid loyalty. But their stance with Mubarak killed it," said another.

Post-Mubarak, the IG held elections for its highest executive body, the Consultative Council, on May 23, 2011, and both Ibrahim and Zuhdi were voted out by members. Others, including Zumur, came to the fore. The Consultative Council of today is quite different from the one that decided to assassinate President Anwar Sadat. Four of the nine members hold PhDs, including Dr. Safwat Abd al-Ghani, the former head of the armed wing. He was also the author of "Another God with Allah? Declaring War on the Parliament," the IG's anti-democratic manifesto, which was also quite popular among other Jihadists. Abd al Ghani's dissertation, however, was on political plurality and democratic transition.

The IG, in its new form, decided to participate in the parliamentary elections. The question is why? The likelihood of losing was quite high, especially to Islamist rivals like the Brotherhood and the Salafis. The reactions to the IG leaders speaking on TV were largely negative, with thousands of tweets mocking them. Moreover, the mid-ranks complained that the grassroots were not so eager to fill in the party membership and registration forms. "I am responsible for Aswan City, but I know others who are asked by the leadership to fill a number of forms that are 10 times the number of members...we should be led by the realities on the ground, not by the wishful thinking of the leaders," says Ismail Ahmad.

Indeed, a coalition or a merger with a larger, more experienced group like the Brotherhood makes more sense. But the quest for legitimacy and legal protection is one of the main determinants of the current behavior of the IG. In Egypt, there is a saying: "A white dime will serve you in a black day." Aside from the political incorrectness, the reality of the IG is similarly saying "a good party today will serve you in the bad moment tomorrow." In addition, like other Islamists, the IG's history is that of "punching above its weight." It can pull an upset, sometimes.

Egypt's Jihadists today are relatively insignificant and too individualized. (Some also argue that they are good in hiding.) This is not their time. Unarmed civil resistance delivered a heavy blow to Jihadism and significantly undermined its rationale (that armed activism is the most effective and most legitimate tool for change). "The Islamic Group sacrificed a lot in the 1990s," says Ibrahim. "Two thousand its sons were killed, 100 were executed by military trials, and some of our 20,000 prisoners were detained for 20 years without a court order, despite having more than 45 court judgments ordering their release. This is a high price, without achievements. [The] January 25th revolution accomplished great things in 18 days and it was all done peacefully."

Thus far, the IG has adhered to its commitment to abstain from violence, even as a good opportunity to engage in violent activism presented itself. The proliferation of small and mid-size arms is currently a security problem in Egypt, due to the Libyan conflict and other factors. Any group that strategizes for a future armed campaign should be using this rare opportunity. But rather than stockpiling weapons, rebuilding its armed wing, recruiting and training angry teenagers, and manipulating the weak security arrangements, the IG is holding internal elections, asking its members to fill party registration forms, holding anti-sectarian violence rallies, and issuing joint statements for peaceful coexistence with the Coptic Church of Assyut. "We were finally capable of taking revenge from the state security officers who tortured us. Instead we chanted *silmiya* (peaceful)," said Muhammad Abbas, a former member of the IG's armed wing, a graduate of the famous Khaldan training camp in Afghanistan, and a veteran of multiple battles against the Soviets.

But if most of the problems between the IG and the Egyptian government were resolved, this is not necessarily the case with the United States. The United States still holds Dr. Omar Abd al-Rhaman, the first leader of the IG and its inspirational "godfather," who was convicted of "seditious conspiracy" in October 1995. The IG held several rallies in front of the U.S. embassy in Cairo demanding his release. It also organized several widely attended conferences to support him. The IG is also on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations (which generally needs an update). "They are still on the black list, despite abandoning violence 14 years ago. What message does that send?" stated Dr. Osama Rushdi, a democracy activist who was the IG's spokesperson in the mid-1990s who left the organization in 1998. He told me this while showing me a handwritten letter by Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, the famous Jihadist strategist, in which al Suri was complaining that Rushdi was undermining Jihadi activities in Europe.

In any case, U.S. policymakers may want to keep in mind that the group will play a role in the future politics of Egypt, either by forming a coalition with other Islamists or by rebuilding its support base in Upper Egypt. From what I saw, the latter process is ongoing with determination. What is certain, though, is that the IG's subscription to Jihadism is currently expired. Whether others will follow its model or not in the post-Mubarak era is yet to be determined. Egypt was the birthplace of modern Jihadism. But after Mubarak, it may also be its graveyard.

Dr. Omar Ashour is a lecturer in politics and the director of the Middle East Graduate Studies program at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter (UK). He is the author of "The De-Radicalization of the Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements."

Tahrir turning points

By Marc Lynch, August 1, 2011

Al-Shaab Yureed Tatbiq Sharia Allah! The people want to implement God's Sharia! That chant rang through my ears as I struggled through a jam-packed Tahrir Square on Friday July 29, 2011, as hundreds of thousands of Islamists packed the symbolic home of Egypt's revolution to demand that their presence be known. Two days later, the ill-advised occupation of Tahrir Square by mostly secular and leftist political trends which began on July 8 largely ended, as most groups decided to pull out and then security forces cleared the remains. Feelings were running raw in Egypt as the revolution approached yet another turning point. The galvanizing events of the weekend marked a new stage in one of the most urgent battles in post-Mubarak Egypt: who owns the revolution, and who may speak in its name?

Friday's demonstration was originally planned as an Islamist show of strength, defined by demands for "identity and stability," support for the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), and rejection of liberal efforts to draft "supra-constitutional principles." The "Day of Respecting the Will of the People" brought together an "Islamic Front" uniting most of the major Islamist trends including the Muslim Brotherhood, the Gama'a al-Islamiyya, several Salafi parties, and others. Its planners saw it as a response to the July 8 protests which launched the Tahrir sit-in, and to a series of political gambits launched by liberals and secularists which, in their view, were meant to sidestep the will of the people as expressed in the March 2011 referendum.

In the days before the demonstration, a group of political activists brokered an agreement to focus on the unity of the revolution rather than on divisive demands. This was a noble effort, but it proved impossible to maintain in the face of the enthusiasm of the mobilized Islamist cadres. Many of the political trends felt betrayed by the slogans and behavior of the Islamist groups, and pulled out of the demonstration in protest only to return for a counter-demonstration in the evening after most of the Islamists had departed. The days after the rally were consumed with furious arguments and counter-arguments. Islamists argued that there should be nothing divisive about demanding sharia, and that the tense Friday passed without any of the feared violent clashes proved that they lived up to the most important part of the agreement.

The arguments are about far more than the question of who violated which agreements. The Islamist demonstration directly challenged the claim of the secular political forces to embody the revolution or the will of the people, and marked a significant escalation in an ongoing battle of narratives and identity. Why should a coalition of a few dozen small groups of activists have a greater claim on revolutionary legitimacy than the millions of ordinary people who made the revolution? Did the 77 percent yes vote in the referendum on constitutional amendments truly reveal, as so many argued, that the silent majority rejected their revolutionary vision? The show of massive Islamist numbers was meant to show that they, not the political trends, represented the Egyptian people. I overheard a number of proud and excited Salafis on the square marveling at their own presence and numbers. That the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrated its well-honed organization skills came as no surprise, but the ability of the usually disorganized Salafi trends to organize transportation for a large number of members into Cairo could not be dismissed.

The Western media coverage of the Islamist rally was misleading. I can't say that there were no chants or slogans about Osama bin Laden, since it was a long, crowded day in Tahrir. But bin Laden had virtually nothing to do with the day's message. The closest thing I heard to supporting terrorism was a surprisingly huge number of posters and chants for the repatriation of the blind sheik and convicted terrorist Omar Abdel Rahman, a pet issue of the Gama'a al-Islamiyya. Nor is the frequently repeated claim that the Islamists avoided Egyptian flags accurate; in fact, there were thousands of Egyptian flags throughout the square. And while there were not nearly as many women as in earlier rallies, there were plenty there — including a group of women wearing niqab who reached out to help one of my female colleagues during a frightening crowd surge.

The common slogans demanding sharia or the cries of "Islamiyya Islamiyya" should not be taken as a sign of the consolidation of a single, undifferentiated Islamist trend rising to power. The joint slogans masked considerable ongoing disagreements and

competition among Islamist groups. All chanted for implementing sharia, but when pressed on specifics few seemed to have much more in mind than keeping Article 2 of the constitution which defines Egypt as an Islamic country. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis do not agree on what implementing sharia in Egypt would look like, or on many other issues, and will as likely be political rivals as a unified bloc. I watched two Salafis during the rally argue furiously over a flier opposing any constitution other than sharia, with the other equally enthusiastic Islamist insisting that there must be a constitution informed by sharia.

The more important point, easily lost in the political tumult, was that the Salafis and the Gama'a have now shown themselves to be all in for the game of democratic politics within the framework of the nation-state. When I met with leaders of the Salafi al-Nour Party in Alexandria a few days before the march, they spoke eagerly about democratic participation and drafting a platform offering practical solutions to economic and social problems (though of course Islamic identity, demands for sharia, and conservative social norms still loom large in their worldview). For Salafis who have long defined themselves by the rejection of political participation and of nationalism, this is no small thing. After years of reading ideological tracts by Salafi figures explaining the illegitimacy of democracy and denouncing the Muslim Brothers for their political participation, it was rather exhilarating to hear hundreds of thousands of them demanding early elections. Many Egyptians continue, with reason, to worry about the depth of their democratic commitments and their conservative social agendas. But the changes have been remarkable.

The Muslim Brotherhood, for its part, faces a delicate situation. While it clearly relished the show of Islamist power, it also now has to worry about a backlash against that display of strength and the blurring of long-cultivated distinctions from other trends such as the Salafis. It has long sought to position itself as the moderate face of Islamism, triangulating against the more radical Salafis and Gama'a to capture the pious middle ground. Sharing the stage with those forces on July 29, not only infuriated potential secular coalition partners but could also complicate its long-term efforts to reassure mainstream voters. Brotherhood leaders such as Essam el-Erian and Mohammed el-Beltagy were almost immediately backpedaling, disavowing the more controversial slogans and claiming to have honored the agreements with the other political forces even if the Salafis violated the deal (the Salafis, for their part, claim to have never signed the deal in the first place). Muslim Brotherhood youth activists I spoke with after the rally were furious about how it had unfolded, and many even refused to participate.

But the Brotherhood's dilemma pales next to the new reality facing the political activists. The decision to occupy Tahrir looks increasingly like a grievous strategic blunder. Their appeal to revolutionary legitimacy grows more threadbare by the day, absent direct engagement with the issues about which Egyptians really care. While they clearly felt that they had no other way to maintain pressure on the SCAF, the sit-in quickly alienated almost everybody. The violence led by hostile locals that greeted their march on the ministry of defense in Abassiya seemed to symbolize their loss of popular sympathy. During a week in Cairo and Alexandria, I could not find a single person other than the protesters with a good word to say about the Tahrir sit-in. The decision by most groups to end the sit-in ahead of Ramadan offered an opportunity for a fresh start — though the tenor of political discussion among the various activist groups suggests that there is no consensus about the lessons of the sit-in or the path forward.

The SCAF has contributed to the tense political environment. Its attack on the April 6 Movement and the activist community more broadly for its alleged foreign funding has cast a pall over their activities. In Alexandria, the sit-in organizers made me leave after an hour out of fear that I would be photographed in the tent city and used as evidence of American backing. Many participants in the ill-fated march to the ministry of defense believe that the hostile reception by the local neighborhood residents was the result of systematic disinformation and agitation against them. The SCAF has encouraged some of these problems by responding to some protester demands, and thus validating their choice of street politics, but never going far enough on core demands like police reform, stopping military trials for protesters, or compensation for the (increasingly controversial) martyr's families. It is not clear why they felt the need to forcibly empty Tahrir square after most groups had already decided to leave. But at least it seems to remain committed to the most important point of all — the need for elections as soon as possible to create a legitimate civilian government and allow their return to the barracks.

The display of bearded men and women in niqab clearly shocked the political groups that had made Tahrir their own. The reaction was not just about the violation of the agreement, but ran much deeper. On Twitter and Facebook and around the square, they made fun of the Islamist interlopers, ridiculing their behavior and their appearance and their intellect. But their fury could not hide some uncomfortable truths. How could these Islamists not be viewed as an integral part of the Egyptian people? The people wanted Hosni Mubarak gone, but they do not necessarily share the radical political demands of determined socialists or anarchists or cosmopolitan liberals. The Salafis bused in from the provinces are also Egyptians, and they cannot simply be defined out of the newly emerging Egypt if it is to become genuinely democratic. The activists have long talked about "bringing Tahrir to the people." But when those people came to Tahrir, the activists fled.

It is easy to understand why frustrated protesters feel that taking to the streets is the only way to meaningfully pressure the SCAF, but street politics are not democratic politics. Making the size of crowds the currency of political power actively invited the week's Islamist response. The Islamist demonstration and the end of the Tahrir sit-in should be a moment for all sides to catch their breaths, focus on their shared desire for a return to civilian rule and a transition to democracy, and prepare for the coming elections and a return to civilian rule.

Marc Lynch is associate professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University where he is the director of the Institute of Middle East Studies and Project on Middle East Political Science. Follow him @abuaardvark.

Inside Egypt's Salafis

By Lauren Bohn, August 2, 2011

"All Americans think I'm a terrorist," 34-year-old Salafi political organizer Mohammed Tolba exhales with his trademark belly laugh. He grips his gearshift and accelerates to 115 miles per hour down a winding overpass in Cairo. "But I only terrorize the highways." Since the fall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Tolba has constantly been on the go. "The media says we all wear galabeyas (long Islamic dress), put our women in niqabs (a face veil), and will cut off people's hands," Tolba says, dramatically feigning a yawn. "We're the new boogey-man, but people need to know we're normal — that we drink lattes and laugh."

To this end, the silver-tongued IT consultant shuttles regularly from the modish offices of popular television personality Bassem Youssef (he's starring in a segment on the "Egyptian Jon Stewart's" highly anticipated new show) to the considerably less shiny quarters of Cairo's foremost Salafist centers. He's been conducting leadership and media-training workshops for Salafis. "These guys don't know how to talk to the public," says Tolba, rubbing his eyes in exhaustion. "Once they open their mouths and face a camera, man, they ruin everything."

The same might be said for their debut on Egypt's main stage on Friday July 29, 2011, as hundreds of thousands of Salafis joined other Islamist groups in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Droves of people from governorates across Egypt got off buses near Tahrir Square, chanting, "Islamic, Islamic, we don't want secular." One Salafi, Hisham al-Ashry, beamed with pride as he walked back from the square to his tailor shop downtown. "Today is a turning point, we finally showed our strength." Meanwhile, "the liberals and the leftists are freaking out. God protect the nation and revolution," noted popular blogger Zeinobia.

Who are the faces and voices of an oft-deemed bearded and veiled monolith that packed the square? And what exactly do they want?

"Salafi" has become something of a catchall name for any Muslim with a long beard, but Salafism is not a singular ideology or movement with one leader. As Stéphane Lacroix, a French scholar of Islamist movements, explains, it's more a "label for a way of thinking" guided by a strict interpretation of religious text. Salafis aspire to emulate the ways of the first three generations of Islam. Many Salafis have cultivated a distinctive appearance and code of personal behavior, including untrimmed beards for men and the niqab for women.

The Salafi culture has been growing in Egypt for decades, but until the revolution had little formal political presence. "Satellite Salafism" hit Egypt in 2003, with around 10 Salafi-themed TV channels broadcasting from Egypt on Nilesat. The intensely popular Al-Nas, Arabic for the People, began broadcasting in 2006. Its programming focuses on issues of social justice and sermons by prominent Salafi preachers, like Mohammed Yaqoub and Mohammed Hassan, whose tapes and books are common fixtures among street vendors throughout Cairo. Nobody knows exactly how many Salafis there now are in Egypt, but Abed Moneim Aboul Fotouh, a presidential candidate formerly of the Muslim Brotherhood, recently estimated their number at around 20 times the number of Muslim Brotherhood members (unofficial reports estimate Muslim Brotherhood membership between 400,000 to 700,000 members).

Salafis in Egypt abstained from politics for decades. Under Mubarak, many were arrested and tortured. Salafi gathering points like Aziz Ballah, where the charismatic Tolba has been doing most of his media training and outreach to Salafis, were known as the most intensely monitored institutions in Cairo. They rationalized their apolitical conditions with an elaborate ideological argument that rejected political participation as contrary to the Islamic sharia. Most Salafis stayed away from the January 25 revolution. For decades, they lambasted the Muslim Brothers for their willingness to participate in a secular political system based on the laws of man rather than the laws of God. But now they are rushing to join that same system. What do they hope to achieve through the ballot box?

Almost all Salafis currently agree on the need to protect and strengthen Egypt's Islamic identity, which in practice means defending the second amendment of Egypt's Constitution which preserves sharia as the main source of Egyptian law. The argument that sharia is not only compatible with democracy, but actually required by democracy, is a new approach for Salafis who have traditionally rejected the very concept of democracy. Sixty-two percent of Egyptians believe "laws should strictly follow the teachings of the Quran," according to an April 2011 Pew Research Center poll. "Majorities usually run countries. So why should the minority [secularists] rule everything," poses Abdel Moneim Al-Shahat, a prominent Salafi scholar and the spokesperson for the Salafi movement in Alexandria.

What would this mean, exactly? Many non-Salafis fear that implementing sharia on Salafi terms would force women into niqab, turn Christians into second-class citizens, and impose Quranic punishments for serious offenses such as flogging or cutting of hands for theft. Some Salafis give ample causes for such fears, but others see this as a red herring. "Egyptians aren't against sharia, they just fear the people who they think will impose and enforce it ignorantly," reasons Doaa Yehia, Tolba's equally quick-witted wife.

The Salafi party al-Nour, Arabic for light, has tried to present what it considers to be practical solutions to economic and social problems, in part to avoid the perception that they are only interested in imposing sharia. Nour spokesman Mohammad al-Yousri argues that "everyone thinks sharia is our only aim, but that's like someone who has cancer and you tell them to get a nose job. Right now, Egypt's a poor, weak underdeveloped country." Or, as Sheikh Ahmed Bin Farouk told me after Friday prayer in Ain Shams, a poor section of Northeastern Cairo, "everybody wants to talk about the cutting of hands. Khalas, stop. Before this could ever happen, we'd have to assure almost full economic and social equality. And obviously that could take anywhere from five to 500 years."

Where the politically savvy Muslim Brotherhood figures have mastered a public discourse of moderation and compromise, Yousry says Salafis know "when to take a stand. We're not all smiles like Amr Khaled [a popular moderate Muslim televangelist who's consistently likened to the "Billy Graham of Islam.] We know what we believe and there are limits to flexibility." When asked how he lost two fingers, he recounted his fighting in Iraq in 2004 with the resistance against U.S.-led forces.

During another conversation with scholar and cleric Sheikh Hassan Abu Alashbal, known for one of his televised appeals to President Obama to "revert" to Islam, I asked what Salafis might do if a moderately liberal figure, like famous opposition leader Mohammed ElBaradei, should come to power through the ballot box. "Don't worry, we're not going to kill him," Hisham al-Ashry, a Cairene tailor, comically interjects with a Brooklyn drawl he acquired from living in New York City for 15 years. "We'll just cut off his hands or maybe his throat." Sheikh Alashbal glares at him, unfazed by the joke. "We are not worried about liberals," he says. "If you only watch television, you'd think they're everywhere, but if you go to villages and among the true Egyptian people...you will find they'll only take sharia."

Such talk may be meant to reassure non-Salafis but often only frightens them even more. They point to the Salafi rejection of their attempt to establish "supra-constitutional principles" guaranteeing personal and political freedoms as evidence of their intention to impose their own vision on all Egyptians. Liberals warn that democracy is not only the rule of the majority, but also an agreement on the fundamental rules of the game. But Salafi slogans at the July 29 rally pointedly declared that "there is nothing above the constitution but God's sharia."

Years of repression left the Salafi movements disjointed, with each wagging the finger at the other for being the less authentic or authoritative representative of Islam. Richard Gauvain, a scholar on Cairo's Islamist and Salafi organizations, argues that their power structures are severely weakened by internal feuding. There's little to suggest individuals within the organizations will be able to agree among themselves on questions of political importance. Lacking a clear internal organizational structure, the hallmark of the Muslim Brotherhood, different salafi schools and other Islamist groups hold sway in varied areas of the country. For them to succeed at the ballot box, they will need to overcome these deeply ingrained divides. It is not clear that they can.

There are also generational divides. Many high-profile Salafi sheikhs voiced opposition to the Arab uprisings on grounds they were not modeled on the behavior of the prophet and that the suicide of the iconic young Tunisian Mohammad Bouazizi who set himself on fire was haram. It remains to be seen whether these sheikhs can regain popularity among a younger generation of Salafis who defiantly took to the streets despite contradictory calls from a fractured leadership. "We actually have more trouble connecting people inside the movement than we do connecting with liberals," says al-Nour spokesman Mohammed Yousry. "The challenge is telling these people this is the real Salafi way. It's wide open and progressive."

Such divides make it difficult for Salafis to present a clear, unified message. For instance, while Salafi political spokesmen emphasize the modesty of their political aims, scholars like Sheikh Alashbal say there's no doubt the caliphate, referring to the first system of government established in Islam that politically unified the Muslim community, will be established. "This is the purpose of the revolution," he explains in his ornate living room lined with leather-bound scholarly tomes — many his own. "It's Allah's plan for us to build one country in the Muslim world and rule the world. There is no doubt we won't."

For a movement that abstained from politics for decades, the Salafi "ground game" has been impressive. Their ability to organize transportation of their cadres from all over Egypt to Tahrir Square last week opened some eyes. The Nour party registered even before most of its mainstream counterparts. Armed with a logo of a bright blue horizon, they've already set up three spacious offices in Cairo, branches in the Delta, and even up the Nile throughout the oft-neglected Upper Egypt. Its spokesman Yousry predicts Islamists will yield 40 percent of seats in parliament. In a single breath, he rattles off the names of cities and governorates in Egypt where he "knows" the party has the most presence and power on the ground.

Their strategy rests in part on the tried and true Islamist method of outreach and social services. Mohammed Nour, director of the Nourayn Media group and member of the new party, sits in his fashionably orange-speckled office near Cairo's Corniche, constantly switching between his iPhone and iPad. For him, the math is simple. "Other parties are talking to themselves on Twitter, but we are actually on the streets. We have other things to do than protest in Tahrir."

One Friday in early July 2011 while protesters occupied Tahrir Square, Nour party member Ehab Zalia, 43, distributed medical supplies in the slum city of El Ghanna. Another Friday, 24-year-old Ehab Mohammed sold gas tubes at a reduced price to residents

of the impoverished Haram City. "This isn't campaigning, this is our religion," he explained. One resident in the neighborhood, Aliaa Neguib, 42, says she has no plans to officially join the group, but in a country where 40 percent of people live below the poverty line, efforts like these are effective. "We need services. If they are loyal and give us that, we will support them." And they will, promises spokesperson Yousry.

The efforts of a new generation of Salafis to find their place in a post-Mubarak Egypt take many paths. In a virtual parallel reality outside of Cairo, nestled in Egypt's own Paramount studio lot, Mohammed Tolba strokes his beard and gets ready for his close-up. Shortly after Mubarak stepped down, Tolba and like-minded friends created Salafayo Costa, a spin on the international-coffee chain, as an internet-savvy public relations campaign meant to debunk stereotypes. With a Facebook group of almost 9,000 members, the coexistence group hopes to broaden political dialogue. He and his brother, Ezzat, a liberal filmmaker, released a video on YouTube called "Where's my Ear" in an attempt to bridge what they deem a dangerously growing chasm between secularists and Salafis in post-Mubarak Egypt. The film is in reference to a notorious sectarian crime in late March 2011 when Salafis allegedly assaulted a Coptic Christian and cut off his ear.

Now, he's bringing these "normal Salafis" to a broader Egyptian audience through the comedian Bassem Youssef's hit show. Under hot lights, Youssef pretends to throw a punch at him in "a battle for the future of Egypt." After taping a segment in which Tolba and his liberal brother make light of the holy month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast throughout the day and festively break in the evening, one of the show's directors grows nervous, worried the segment will offend Egyptian viewers.

Youssef promptly cuts him off. "We need to diffuse anger and tension the Egyptian way — with comedy. It's time liberals and Salafis talk to each other, get out of their comfort zone." Tolba poses for a picture with one of the show's young production assistants who excitedly announces it's the first time he's talked to a Salafi. Tolba pantomines as though he's cutting off his ear.

Still, his toughest critics might be Salafists themselves. Tolba's efforts have registered unfavorably among an old guard of strident Salafis who've labeled his approach "inappropriate" or "unnecessary." He's received a steady flow of hate mail on his perpetually drained white blackberry. And some scholars and even friends have refused to speak with him.

"Look, I'm calling for Salafis to get off their chairs and talk to those people who are scared of them, and for liberals to do the same. Stop isolating yourselves," Tolba says, before taking a call from a "not so funny" sheikh — a gratuitous reminder the task won't be so easy. "This is democracy. This is the new Egypt."

Lauren E. Bohn is a Fulbright fellow and multimedia journalist based in Cairo. Follow her on Twitter at @LaurenBohn.

How Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood Will Win

By Shadi Hamid, November 3, 2011

The performance of the Islamist party Ennahda in the October 23, 2011 Tunisian elections, in which it won 41.5 percent of the seats, refocused attention on the Egyptian elections scheduled for November 28. Some analysts minimized the Muslim Brotherhood's prospects for success by pointing to polls suggesting that the group — the largest and best organized in Egypt – hovered between 15 to 30 percent approval. It may be true that the Brotherhood wasn't as popular as we had thought. But elections aren't popularity contests. In fact, as the campaign unfolded, it appeared likely that Egypt's Islamists would do even better than expected, just like their Tunisian counterparts.

In the run-up to the Tunisian elections, Ennahda was polling around 20 percent. Yet they ended up with nearly double. In elections — particularly founding elections in which new parties need to introduce themselves to voters across the country — organization and strategy are what counts, not high approval ratings. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood excels on both counts. While most liberal and leftist parties are effectively starting from scratch, the Brotherhood already has a disciplined ground game, fine-tuned from three decades of contesting syndicate and national elections.

During the November 2010 parliamentary contest — arguably the most fraudulent Egypt had ever seen — I had the chance to witness the Brotherhood's "get-out-the-vote" operation up close. One Brotherhood campaign worker, perhaps unaware it would sound somewhat implausible, told me that the organization has an internal vote turnout of nearly 100 percent. In other words, everyone who is an active Muslim Brotherhood member is expected to vote and actually does. Even if this is a stretch, it is true that

the Brotherhood, in part because it is a religious movement rather than a political party, has the sort of organizational discipline of which competing parties can only dream.

This discipline is deeply rooted in the organization's culture. Each Muslim Brotherhood member signs on to a rigorous educational curriculum and is part of something called an usra, or family, which meets weekly. If a Brother chooses to stay home on election day, other Brothers will know. But it's not just a matter of peer expectations. At each polling station, there is a Brotherhood coordinator who essentially does a whip count. Because the number of voters at a particular polling station can be quite small — with the number of Brothers in the hundreds — this is feasible in many districts. The "whip" stays there the entire day, watching who comes and goes and tallies up the figures. If you were supposed to go and didn't, the whip will know. Perhaps sensing my skepticism, one such whip assured me, "Well, you have to understand — I know every single Brother who lives in the area."

With an electoral system that is, in the words of one activist, "algorithmically complicated," knowing your district takes on even more importance. As Daphne McCurdy pointed out in a POMED report on Tunisia, "Most polling in Tunisia has focused on nationwide levels of support, entirely overlooking variation within specific electoral districts." Ennahda was the only party that had coverage throughout the country, with tailored strategies for each district, including rural areas. Here, the Brotherhood has yet another built-in advantage. With 88 deputies in the previous parliament (2005-2010), the group was able to provide a greater array of services on the local level and build stronger relations with constituents.

What about the Brotherhood's competition? The Brotherhood's political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), is joined by Ayman Nour's liberal al-Ghad party, the Nasserist Karama party, and a smattering of smaller parties, forming the "Democratic Alliance" list. There are four other major lists, three of which have a liberal or leftist orientation (Egyptian Bloc, the Revolution Continues, and the Wafd list). With their considerable funding and patronage networks, the right-of-center Wafd party, headed by multi-millionaire Al-Sayyid Badawy, and remnants of the old ruling National Democratic Party, are also well positioned to secure a significant share of the vote.

For their part, the newly formed liberal parties have suffered from an inability to articulate a clear ideology or agenda — a major failing in a country where "liberalism" continues to have a negative connotation. Many liberal parties have sometimes appeared to stand for little more than not being Islamist, opting to stoke public fears of impending theocracy. Such a strategy would be likely to backfire in a country where 67 percent of Egyptians say that laws should strictly follow the Quran's teachings, while another 27 percent say that they should in some way follow the values and principles of Islam, according to an April 2011 Pew poll. In Tunisia, the Progressive Democratic Party, which positioned itself as the anti-Islamist choice, got pummeled in the polls, while the two liberal parties that maintained good relations with Ennahda — Congress for the Republic and Ettakatol — faired relatively well, finishing in second and third place respectively.

This leaves an obvious course for leftist and liberal parties, one that offers considerably more promise — a razor-sharp focus on Egypt's mounting economic troubles. But this, too, is challenging, as most parties — leftist or not — use similar rhetoric on the economy: Poverty is bad; jobs are good; social justice is better, and so on. As Ayesha Sabayala of the Economist Intelligence Unit pointed out regarding Tunisia, "If you look at parties' manifestos, with the exception of the far left parties, most have the same economic objectives: to reduce unemployment and increase infrastructure in interior." The Muslim Brotherhood has smartly positioned itself as a voice for the poor, even though its economic platform (something designed more for foreign investors and the international community) is surprisingly free market-oriented. For example, the group launched "Millioniyyat al-Khayr" (the million-man act of goodwill), an initiative to provide 1.5 million kilos of meat to 5 million Egyptians for the Eid al-Adha holiday.

There is still the possibility that the Brotherhood may underperform — as they did in the Doctors' Syndicate elections. But, be careful what you wish for. The alternative to moderate Islamists may very well be less moderate Islamists. Well before the Arab Spring, Brotherhood leaders often told me that their youth were increasingly being swayed by Salafi ideas. One Brotherhood official told me that Salafis outnumbered them five to one. Salafi groups have repeatedly sounded ambitious notes, with one leader claiming

that they would win 30 percent of the seats. Ambitious as they are, Salafis are political novices, with virtually no experience running parliamentary campaigns. But they are proving quick learners and have managed to unify their ranks, bringing together four Salafi parties under the banner of the "Islamic alliance." Moreover, liberal claims (or hopes) that Salafis are well outside of the mainstream may be wishful thinking. In a December 2010 poll, 82 percent of Egyptians said they favored stoning adulterers, while 77 percent supported cutting off the hands of thieves. The only movement besides the Brotherhood with a nationwide grassroots base, Salafis have taken to organizing traffic in congested areas of Alexandria, engage in door-to-door education campaigns, and provide health services to the poor.

The parliamentary elections, then, are not necessarily about ideas. They are about voters. And, in this respect, Egypt's elections are looking a lot like they do in the United States. The "good guys," whoever they are, don't always win. Indeed, if Islamist parties do as well as they might — winning upwards of 50 percent of the vote — the alarmism and hand wringing from Western quarters will be considerable. The important metric for Egypt's troubled transition, though, isn't who wins, but rather, if Egyptians have the opportunity to choose their own representatives free of intimidation and interference. Democracy, as Western democracies have long known, is about the right to make the wrong choice.

Shadi Hamid is director of research at the Brookings Doha Center and a fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution.

The Muslim Brotherhood Takes Twitter

By Lauren E. Bohn, November 18, 2011

Miriam can't stop talking. And when she does, it's mostly to look down at a torrent of emails, SMSs, and tweets flooding her smartphone. It's been a heady nine months for the soft-spoken but sharp-witted 24-year-old Egyptian student turned activist. She's juggling the ordinary demands of a heavy course-load at Egypt's top university with a slew of extracurriculars (she's embarrassed to admit she's an avid squash player), but also working through the existential hangover of heavily participating in a leaderless revolution that's now causing more of a headache than a thrill. While polishing some academic work on the role of social media in Egypt's uprising, she's been ferociously tweeting on the country's virtual front-lines, fielding 140-character blows left and right. And she's doing it for the Muslim Brotherhood.

"Miriam" (she prefers to use a pseudonym, for "security reasons") is one of the admins of @Ikhwanweb, the official English-language Twitter page for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, one of the most prominent Islamist organizations in the world. Ikhwanweb, the Muslim Brotherhood's official English website, started the twitter account @Ikhwanweb back in 2009. For years, the account was a robotic-curated Twitter feed which did little more than link to the website's posts. But Miriam has recently helped transform the account into a virtual coliseum for some of Egypt's most heated debates.

Often, @Ikhwanweb fastidiously engages journalists ("You got the schedule for our daily rallies, right?"), critics ("We have a lot more important things to focus on and an election to win," in response to a flurry of questions regarding their funding), and curious lay-tweeps alike ("Check chapter 4 of our party platform for our position, the economy section at this link"). Their goal? "To spread the truth," they say, and engage with an English-speaking audience and liberals who wouldn't otherwise interact with them. But their critics accuse them instead of presenting a falsely forthcoming English-language front that masks their true political intentions.

"We're tweeting to humanize the Brotherhood and correct misconceptions," Miriam says. "We're not this big, scary terrorist organization." The social media enthusiast grew up with the long-banned Muslim Brotherhood. Her parents are something of Brotherhood stalwarts — her mother, a journalism professor, was running for parliament in an affluent Cairo suburb. But she's also very much a digital native, who came of age alongside the activist generation made famous by the January 2011 uprising. "There are so many people in the Brotherhood like me, who are young, educated, speak many languages, travel," she explains. "I'm not an anomaly, but everyone has the wrong idea about us."

Miriam's partner-in-tweeting, Hazem Malky, 36 — a self-described "certified Twitter addict" who previously tweeted prolifically at @hazemmalky publicly, but recently locked his account to avoid "hate-tweets" — is an editor at Ikhwanweb and medical doctor by training. Currently based in New York, he also prefers to use a pseudonym, citing worries over "Zionist elements" and the United States government. He talks a mile a minute with a vaguely Brooklyn drawl, adroitly weaving arguments together with an easy mix of American vernacular and Classic Arabic. He says he tweets from his iPhone on the road, at the dinner table, even in his sleep. "Actually," he concedes, "it's sort of pathetic."

In part, their turn to Twitter reflects a broader need for the Muslim Brotherhood to engage with and reassure Egyptians and the West. The Brotherhood has been banned since 1954 and long held down by autocratic regimes. However, their established political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party, seemed to have the upper hand in parliamentary elections. After 24 protesters, mostly Coptic Christians, were killed outside Egypt's State TV building, Maspiro, in early October 2011, sectarian tensions ran high. Malky said it was important for the Brotherhood to use Twitter more aggressively to respond to those concerns. "Many were implicating us, saying we had a special deal with the military," he says over Skype, blaming both Egyptian state and independent media for habitually bashing Islamists. "But we're used to fighting back and this is just a new frontier. We know we won't change everyone's mind in a few months, but we're using every channel we can to correct and inform."

Malky and Miriam repeatedly emphasize that the buffed up Twitter feed isn't a top-down decision from the Brotherhood's notoriously stringent and webbed hierarchy, but rather an internal administrative decision made by Ikwhanweb's editorial team who say they have full control in managing the website without Muslim Brotherhood "interference." Their tweets are not vetted, but do represent the official position of the Brotherhood — a potentially dangerous combination for any political organization. Still, they say Brotherhood big-wigs, like Khairat el-Shater, known not only as the organizational brains behind Ikhwanweb, but the most important power broker of today's Brotherhood, "actively encourages" their online efforts.

The revamping of their Twitter feed into an instant resource hub isn't the Brotherhood's first attempt at establishing a vast digital footprint. In addition to Ikwhanweb and Ikwhanonline, the Brotherhood's media extends to an extensive network of portals like Ikhwanbook, Ikhwanwtube, Ikhwanwiki, Ikhwanophobia, and Ikhwanscope. Having planned to expand the unit to cover parliamentary, and later presidential, elections throughout the country, Ikhwanweb's team of self-proclaimed "media geeks" ranges from 15-20 executives, editors, reporters, translators, and technicians. And they plan to soon share a large new office space with their Arabic counterpart Ikhwanonline.

"They're using the same approach they always have, just now they have a new tool," says Shadi Hamid, Director of Research at the Brookings Center in Doha. "Liberals are tweeting and providing a certain narrative about the revolution. The Brotherhood realizes there's a chance to push back, and say 'Hi, we're here too.' They won't leave the digital space solely to their competitors."

Perhaps because the English-language Twitter feed is engaging a largely skeptical audience, their online game has been one mostly played on defense. And for good reason, says analyst Michael Hanna of the Century Foundation. "There's a lot to be defensive about — their internal authoritarianism, a lack of transparency regarding the source of their funds, their cozying up to hard-line Salafis," he says. "The list goes on."

Other critics point to worrying discrepancies and mismatched opaque strings of policy that blur just what those interests really are. Perhaps most notable is the Brotherhood's stance toward women and Copts (the minority Christian population that makes up 5-10

percent of Egyptian society) in leadership roles. @Ikhwanweb recently tweeted, to much confusion, that the Brotherhood would accept and be open to nominating a Copt or female prime minister "if it was necessary." Just an hour before they tweeted they would "accept a woman, whether Muslim or Copt, if she's elected by the people to be president."

"The president is different than the Prime Minister position," Malky clarifies in a fit of mental calisthenics over Twitter. "The Muslim Brotherhood is OK with woman or copt as prez IF elected by the people although, we won't nominate either on a FJP ticket. Nominating is one thing and accepting if elected by majority or another party ticket is another," Malky direct-messages in a split-second. "Fahemtee? LOL." (Do you understand?)

That's the thing. Not many do. Such confusion in laying out a complicated political program in 140-character snippets has led many tweeps to chide the group for not only failing to put forth a unified stance but instead producing a disingenuous Ikhwanonline "lite" version for a Western audience.

Ed Husain, senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, has been tweet-spatting daily with @Ikhwanweb after he ran a piece on his CFR blog "Is the Muslim Brotherhood Bribing Voters in Egypt?" Ikwhanweb promptly issued a response, to which Husain then responded. Husain calls Malky an archetypal spin-doctor, playing a game on Twitter from New York, far from the Egyptian streets.

"They put forward these people who are fluent in English, can argue well, and produce really nice quotes, but they're not representative," Husain argues. "The Brotherhood's backbone is deeply conservative. They're playing a deceitful and dangerous game."

Khaled Hamza, Ikhwanweb's chief editor who was arrested in 2008 after meeting with a human rights activist, acknowledges they have a responsibility to transparently discuss such matters. But he rejects the accusation of a double discourse. "We don't and won't

have an apologetic discourse. We are inherently moderate in our ideology. There's no need for us to hedge and there's no need for people be afraid of us."

Hamid says that's not so much manipulative as it is natural. "When people look at the Brotherhood, they often ask: 'Don't they have a dual discourse?' Of course they do," he says. "They have multiple discourses and they're playing to different audiences. That's what political parties do. They have different personalities and currents. It's a group of 300,000 members, what do you expect?"

The group's casual adoption of Twitter is reflective of a central issue and broader question the Muslim Brotherhood faces in Egypt's embryonic political landscape: who speaks for the Brotherhood? A doe-eyed 24-year-old media studies student? Or the organization's number-two, a brawny engineer, who spent 12 years behind Mubarak's bars?

"Both," Malky says simply.

There's an increasingly evident difference between the Brotherhood's use of Twitter and the more familiar constellation of liberal and secular activists. As a new political system is being born on a slow roller coaster ride of uncertainty, Egyptians are forced to confront the question of what they stand for, rather than the much easier one of what they're against. Over the last several months, Egypt's "Twitterati," personalities and activists, have been struggling to establish compelling ground games. Many are routinely attacked for failing to connect with the concerns of average Egyptians. But nobody doubts that the Brotherhood has a real presence on the streets. Their political program spans 45 pages and they've consistently brought out hundreds with simultaneous daily rallies in multiple locations across the city and in multiple governorates.

"All the liberals have, what they think is, popular support on Twitter, but there's no relevance on the street. For us, it's the reverse," says Miriam. "We're working the other way."

Down in Beni Suef, a dusty Upper Egyptian governorate about 75 miles south of Cairo, the Brotherhood began soft-campaigning in early summer 2011. Long the wellspring of their support, they spearheaded weekly events like their hallmark food-drives and civic awareness workshops in nearby rural villages where the fellaheen, Egypt's agricultural class, say only the Brotherhood comes around.

"We've known them for awhile," Ahmed Naguib of the al-Bidini village says, swatting a fly away from one of his deep-onyx eyes covered in cataracts from a cement factory accident a few years back. "Who else can we really trust?"

On "a slow day," 50 people are gathered in the Brotherhood's office, eating chocolate éclair-like pastries and unpacking brown boxes, filled to the brim with new baby-blue baseball caps baring the Freedom and Justice party's insignia — two scales set against a vibrant sea of blue and green. The secretary general of the Brotherhood in Beni Suef, Abdel Azeem El Sharkawy, puts down his mint tea and laughs when asked about their electoral prospects.

"We're confident. We're not the ones separated from reality," he says, his entourage chuckling in unison. "In Egypt, the only place you'll find a liberal, a secular is on Twitter or on talk-shows."

Back in the bustling capital at a crowded cafe, Miriam runs through a looming to-do list, taking her smartphone out of its brown leather case to check the time.

"Hey, I have to go to Mom's rally, I'm late," she says. Soon, she was sweeping through a crowd of hundreds gathered in front of Mubarak's former presidential palace, passing pocket-sized glossy yellow and blue flyers roadside to drivers.

"We've got a campaign truck outside of Mubarak's old house," a few of the young men chant giddily. "We've been waiting to do this for awhile," says 47-year-old Mohammed Ahmed, in what seems like a vast understatement. The truck starts blasting triumphant nationalist songs from its speakers, and soon the crowd, teeming with children propped up on shoulders, marches through a Christian area in the upscale Cairo suburb chanting, "Copts our brothers, we will protect them."

A few nights later, close by, but in a seemingly different world, liberal parliamentary candidate Amr Hamzawy drew in 30 or so people at a quiet upscale bookstore, where glossy photo-books of the revolution and books like "Tweets from Tahrir" line the oak shelves.

Miriam snaps a few photographs of her mother, who dashed through back alleys with a female brigade of Brotherhood members, waving to residents watching from open-windows and shaking storeowners' hands like a rock star. "This is what we do best," Miriam says, a sparkle in her eyes. "The streets. And this is what matters."

Lauren E. Bohn is a Fulbright fellow and multimedia journalist based in Cairo. Follow her on Twitter at @LaurenBohn.

Egypt's Salafi Surge

By Sarah A. Topol, January 4, 2012

MANSOURA, Egypt — It was the morning of the third and final round of Egypt's parliamentary elections and Ammar Fayed, an activist for the Muslim Brotherhood's political party, was nervous as hell.

The 28-year-old marketing manager, who sits on the executive board of the youth branch of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) in the governorate of Dakahlia, sported a tiny FJP pin on the lapel of his gray blazer and a thumb stained blue from voting. He explained the situation: Thirty-six seats were up for grabs in this province in the fertile Nile Delta. The conservative region is in the Brotherhood's heartland — it should have been a cakewalk.

There was just one problem, Fayed admitted: "We made a fundamental miscalculation."

The Brotherhood found itself outflanked on the right by the Salafi al-Nour Party, which challenged the movement's religious credentials and gained a surprising degree of traction in the process. Who could have predicted that the Salafis — adherents to a fundamentalist version of Islam that until Egypt's revolution eschewed politics as un-Islamic — would morph into an electoral powerhouse? Even the Brotherhood, whose vote-counting abilities would impress the likes of Karl Rove, never saw it coming, and the Salafis' success threatened to upend the movement's carefully laid plans for dominating Egypt's post-revolutionary political scene.

After decades of trying to convince Egypt's liberals, leftists, and other activists of their seriousness in solving the country's titanic economic problems, the Brothers suddenly found themselves forced to talk about how and when they will implement Islamic law. Not only did their efforts to bolster the movement's religious credentials promise to cause tensions with the other parliamentary blocs, but conflicts with the al-Nour Party also provided useful fodder for Egypt's calculating military rulers, who could exploit the rivalry to keep themselves in power and above scrutiny.

The Brotherhood couldn't afford to ignore the Salafis' rise. Nour was "directly attacking our core," Fayed complained, "saying the Brotherhood is a party like any other, that it is playing politics instead of being a guardian of Islam."

The two Islamist factions wer already trading barbs over the most divisive issue: legislating Islamic law. To get the Salafis' perspective, I met Ibrahim AbdulRahman, the bushy-bearded Nour spokesman in Dakahlia governorate. He named the place: an upscale coffee shop in the center of the city of Mansoura.

It was a difficult interview: The Salafis don't seem particularly keen on explaining themselves to foreign reporters. AbdulRahman slumped in his chair and spent most of his time averting any attempt at a genuine conversation, at first denying Nour was a religious party and feigning confusion as to why Christians weren't running on its ticket, despite public statements by its leaders that their party would never support a Christian president.

After about 20 minutes of useless chatter, AbdulRahman finally stuck the knife into his competitors. "I would say that Salafis and the Nour Party are more aware of the religious sciences and know religion more than the Muslim Brotherhood," he said.

The parties' disagreement over how quickly to implement sharia, or Islamic law, AbdulRahman explained, is at the center of their conflict. "For the Nour Party, one of the primary major goals is to implement sharia at the nearest possible opportunity," he said.

If AbdulRahman was unconcerned with explaining himself to the Western media, Mohammed Yousef, the FJP spokesman in the same governorate, was much more anxious that the world not misunderstand his party. I met him at the FJP headquarters in Mansoura — a prim office with white walls, flat-screen TVs, and computers. A map that showed the percentage of Muslims in African countries, coded in varying shades of green, adorned the wall. Over his shoulder, an FJP banner with a rising white dove had "Freedom, we protect it. Justice, we build it" written across the bird's wings.

Nour is "very fundamentalist," Yousef said — a stark contrast with the FJP, which "sees the state as a civil state with an Islamic background. All rights to all citizens would be preserved, guarded by the law and the constitution, not by religious beliefs of citizens."

Yes, Yousef admited, the Brotherhood also wants to implement Islamic law — but only gradually, with a horizon measured in decades, so that society is prepared. "Nour sees it as a hammerhead action of total transformation to a sharia system," he told me.

In the quiet hum of the office, Yousef described the coming conflict between the two movements. "If the Nour Party or a Salafi party in parliament pressures to implement the hudud [punishments stipulated in the Quran that include stoning adulterers or cutting off the hands of thieves] swiftly, the Muslim Brotherhood will stand firmly against them to prevent that from happening," he said.

That's not the only issue putting the two groups on a collision course. While the Brotherhood wanted to talk about its plans to create new jobs, the Salafis tried to focus the debate in parliament on public social virtues, like headscarves, religious idolatry, and banning alcohol. The Brotherhood was also far more concerned with increasing the powers of parliament and sending the Egyptian military back to their barracks, while Nour's red-meat issue remained the promotion of its conservative social agenda.

Some also speculated that the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) could turn to the al-Nour Party, the second-most powerful force in parliament, to undercut the Brotherhood — after all, it was a tried-and-true tactic that served Mubarak well. "Basically, the military would encourage the Salafis' agenda of legislating public morality in exchange for their support in allowing the military to retain its Mubarak-era prerogatives," said Omar Ashour of the University of Exeter's Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, who was in Cairo to observe the elections.

The thoughts of most voters in Mansoura, however, were a long way from future power struggles. Rather, Egyptians were looking to elect a government that would represent a clean break from the past — and what could be cleaner than a party that has never sought power?

Mosaab Talaat, a 21-year-old veterinary student drinking tea in a small mobile-phone shop with his two friends, said he voted for al-Nour Party, but seemed abashedly shocked when asked whether he considered himself a Salafi. He maintained that he voted for Nour because he thought the party would be less corrupt than Egypt's old ruling class.

"They're different than what we had before, because of their religion. Because they are Muslim, they'll take care of Egypt," Talaat explained. At the campaign events Talaat attended, he saw a famous Salafi sheikh who campaigned for al-Nour Party in Mansoura. It made him think that perhaps Islam combined with politics would breed less corruption.

Ultimately, Talaat thought competition between the Brotherhood and the Salafis would be good for Egypt. "This should be normal. In any parliament there's opposition," he said. "Now, both will be working for the betterment of Egypt."

Whether that's true remains to be seen. If "competition" means brandishing Islamic credentials and providing the military with another tool to divide and rule, Egypt's turbulent transition to democracy and badly stalled economy will remain just that — and the Egyptian people will pay the price.

Sarah A. Topol is a Cairo-based journalist. Follow her on twitter: @satopol.

Old habits die hard!

By Khalil al-Anani, January 31, 2012

Despite its stunning victory in the parliamentary elections, the image of the Muslim Brothers among revolutionary Egyptians is enormously shaking. The clashes between the movement's youth, who went to Tahrir Square to celebrate the anniversary of the Egyptian revolution, and the revolutionary activists, who protested against the military rule, reveals the widening gap between both groups. However, the problem is not that the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is less "revolutionary" than other parties but rather because it simply cannot be.

Since its inception some eight decades ago, the MB avoided revolution or comprehensive change and embraced a gradual, sometimes sluggish, reform policy. Hassan al-Banna, the founder and ideologue of the MB, abandoned the word "revolution" in all his tracts instead advocating reform (Islah). More importantly, the social construction of the movement's members disavows radical change for the sake of gradual reform. The recruitment and socialization (tarbiyya) process, which every MB active member has to undergo, advocates steady and incremental reform of the self, society, and the state. Hence words like change, confrontation, clash, etc. seem alien to the MB's leaders and cadres. More significantly, whereas the "bottom-up" approach, which was espoused by the MB for decades, entrenched its social presence, nevertheless, it aborted its boldness and confidence in facing the Egyptian state.

Indeed, the heavy legacy of repression and exclusion under Hosni Mubarak's regime has made the MB an over-cautious and obsessed organization. Whilst the movement seeks to overcome this legacy, it seems unable to make a full rupture with its imbedded ramifications. True, the movement has supported the revolution since its outset; however, it never sought to initiate it or to end Mubarak's regime through mass protests. The mere result of such a thinking pattern was that accommodation not confrontation has become a key strategy for the MB in dealing with those in power. However, in revolutionary moments such as Egypt is currently undergoing, this strategy appears pointless and may even backfire on the MB and erode its long-standing popularity.

Paradoxically, despite the outright majority attained by its Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the MB is still thinking and acting as an opposition movement rather than a responsible power-holder. It seems reluctant to take full power over the country or as Nathan Brown aptly puts it, "the MB confronts its success." Hence the MB's leaders are grappling with making the shift from long-standing repressed mentalities to those of statesmen, or as one of the MB's defectors told me "they need a psychological rehabilitation" before ruling the country.

However, the question is not how the MB's leaders will rule the country but rather how will they legitimize and justify their power. The response of the MB's leadership on the disputes with other forces provides a gloomy pattern. Strikingly, the statement the movement issued on Tahrir Square's quarrel alarmed those who might disagree with its political stance. Whereas the movement should have apologized for some stark blunders (e.g. disavowing Mohamed Mahmoud's street events, condemning Tahrir protesters during the cabinet building clashes, frequently granting the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) legal and political immunity, etc.), it defied the mounting calls for an immediate transfer of power from the military to a civilian president. Ironically, the MB's newspaper, al-hurriyya wal'adala, reiterated the rhetoric of notorious public newspapers toward Tahrir's protesters when it dubbed them "anarchists [who] seek to destabilize the country."

The conformity between the MB and the SCAF in dealing with the revolution comes as no surprise due to their mutual interests. The MB seeks to consolidate the extraordinary gains it attained since Mubarak's disposal without risking its internal coherence. And the junta wants to maintain their unusual privileges without any civilian oversight. Clearly, both are exemplifying an obsolete mindset. They promote "reform" over "revolution," "stability" not "change," and "procedural" instead of "genuine" democracy. Not surprisingly, they are involved in negotiating, compromising, and brokering the future of the country behind the scene.

Nevertheless, the hoary leadership pattern of the MB impedes its attempt to replace Mubarak's regime and to act as a ruling power. The MB needs to not only reshape and normalize its relationship with the state, society, and other political forces after decades of differentiation and operate as a "normal" political movement as opposed to a sub-state actor but more importantly to restructure its internal organization to fit with the new political environment in Egypt. Besides its controversial relationship with the FJP (which will likely discredit the party at some point), the MB's internal structures suffer from inertia. There are ample examples in this regard. For instance, it was expected after the revolution that the MB would rebuild its main structures (e.g. The Guidance Bureau (maktab alirshad al'am), the General Shura Council (majlis al-Shura al'am), and Administrative Bureaus (al-Makatib al-Idariyya), to be based on more democratic and representative procedures. However, the movement maintained these structures and marginalized those who were appealing for change. Not surprisingly, many of the MB's young activists are increasingly disenchanted and dissatisfied by the movement's stagnation and the unwise political behavior of its leaders. As one of the young Brothers told me "the revolution has not yet shattered the movement's old narratives." More ironically, even after lifting brutal surveillance and dissolving the State Security Apparatus (gihaz amnil dawla), the MB still practices its secrecy "habit" in running internal activities. The weekly and bi-monthly meetings of its micro-unites, the Family (al-usra) and the Branch (shu'ba), are convened clandestinely.

The FJP, so far, resembles its patron. It inherited the MB's organizational and political tactics. The way the party has selected its General Secretary, Saad el-Katatni, to become the parliament speaker provides a striking example. Up until now, neither the MB's grassroots nor the public knows how el-Katatni was chosen, who contested him, and how and when the selection process took place. The party did not issue a clear statement in this regard and none of its members asked. Unlike their Moroccan counterparts in the Party of Justice and Development (PJD), who held internal elections for governmental positions, the FJP is inclined to replicate the MB's pattern in appointing positions, lacking in transparency and accountability. Thus, the underlying factor behind the party's sweeping victory in the parliamentary elections should be attributed not to its revolutionary platform or liberal credentials but mainly because the social reservoir of its patron, the Muslim Brotherhood. Therefore, for Egypt to proceed toward a viable democracy, its new leading power (the MB) should be "revolutionized," otherwise nothing will change. However, old habits die hard!

Khalil al-Anani is a Scholar at the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University and former visiting fellow at the Brookings Institute. He can be reached at k.m.ibrahim@durham.ac.uk.

The advent of "informal" Islamists

By Khalil al-Anani, March 19, 2012

The gray-bearded sheikh appealed to his presidential candidate counterparts to join him at a press conference to be held in his regular mosque. While his contenders eluded, the sheikh **stood** amid hundreds of his followers and supporters to protest and chant against the referral of a group of civilians to the military court. Hazem Salah Abu Ismail, the 51-year-old veteran Islamist, has compellingly captivated his followers by his presidential and charismatic merits, at least rhetorically. Clearly, Abu Ismail's mosque-show was a shrewd attempt to kick off his presidential campaign. However, it also reflects how the new "informal" Islamists perceive politics. For them, all politics is retail.

The fragmentation of the Islamist scene in Egypt is a hallmark characteristic of the post-Hosni Mubarak era. After stagnation and dominance by one force, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), the Islamist scene has been drastically reshaped. More than 15 Islamists parties have officially or unofficially emerged after the revolution. Myriad Islamists have overwhelmed the public sphere freely and painlessly. And a parliament dominated by Islamists is in commission. It seems the lure of politics has immersed Islamists.

However, while many are preoccupied by the "rise" of the Muslim Brothers and the ultra-conservative Salafis, "informal" Islamists are stepping into politics vigorously and freely. They are not officially affiliated with any Islamist movement. Nor are they keen to establish their own organizations. Ironically, they shunned joining any of the new Islamists parties. Moreover, whereas "formal" Islamists, for example, the MB, ad-Dawa al-Salafiyya, and ex-Jihadists, rushed to formal politics, "informal" Islamists prefer to play outside the official framework. They vividly operate in the new and expansive religious market that has flourished in Egypt since the revolution.

The umbrella of "informal" Islamists is wide-ranging. It encompasses the full spectrum of religious actors. Starting from the classical Salafi sheikhs, including the popular preachers Mohamed Hassan, Mohamed Hussien Yakub, and Abu Ishaq al-Howini, to the dissents of the MB, such as the well-known Islamist and presidential candidate Abdel Moniem Abuol Fotouh, to independent Islamists, such as the Qatari-based sheikh Yussif al-Qaradawi and the lawyer and Islamic intellectual Mohamed Selim al-Awa, "informal" Islamists are dominating the new public sphere in Egypt after the revolution. All are outspoken, charismatic, and influential preachers. Hence their followers and supporters are inestimable.

There are three significant distinctions between "formal" and "informal" Islamists. First, while "formal" Islamists rely heavily on their organizational structures for outreach, "informal" Islamists capitalize on social networks (kinship, friendships, families, etc.) as well as establishing themselves in the virtual sphere (internet, Facebook, the media, etc.) to broaden their audience. Hence they are free from organizational burdens and responsibilities.

Second, whereas the former are pervasive in the low and low-middle classes, the latter are a crosscutting phenomenon. They have followers from different social strata: urban and rural, poor and rich, schools and universities, etc. For them, street vendors are important as well as university professors.

Third, while "formal" Islamists espouse the conventional approach of "bottom-up" efforts to accomplish their agenda, "informal" Islamists reversed the course and seek to penetrate the state. They do not aim to Islamize individuals or reshape society but rather to empower them in the face of power-holders. More importantly, they target the members of "formal" Islamist organizations. Hence, they embody a real concern for "formal" Islamists such as the case of Abuol Fotouh with the MB and Abu Ismail with the Salafi al-Nour Party.

Several of these "informal" Islamists mounted serious campaigns for the Presidency: Abd el-Moneim Abuol Fotouh, Hazem Abu Ismail, and Mohammed Selim al-Awa.The first is an iconic Islamist leader with a remarkable political presence. His genuine and distinctive discourse has made him one of the most influential Islamists in Egypt over the past three decades. He combines an ideological **mosaic** of Islamic, liberal, and leftist views that resonate with various spectators. Since he broke with the MB in May

2011, he became more powerful and influential among young Egyptians particularly Islamists who view him as the "Erdogan" of Egypt, as one told me. Moreover, for many liberals and leftists, Abuol Fotouh became the "revolution candidate" after the withdrawal of Mohamed ElBaradei from the presidential race.

As for Abu Ismail, he embodies a very significant case of "informal" Islamism. On one hand, he is not officially a member of any Islamist movement. He plays on the divide lines between the MB and Salafists. Thus, he employs his preceding "unofficial" links with the MB to get their grassroots support. At the same time, he utilizes his Salafi appearance and discourse to attract Salafist constituencies. On the other hand, Abu Ismail leapt into politics after the revolution through his antagonistic, yet useless, rhetoric against the military. Moreover, Abu Ismail invests greatly in the Salafi media to reach his supporters. His simplistic and populist discourse resonates with many Egyptians who view religion as vehicle for change.

Nevertheless, al-Awa is the most visible brand of "informal" Islamist. Over the past two decades, he established himself as an intellectual Islamist. He is one of the architects of "*wasatiyya*," or the centrism school of thought. Hence his discourse reverberates with the middle and upper-middle classes. Until recently he was a highly respected figure among Islamists before he discredited himself by siding with the junta at some occasions. In addition to his oratorical skills, he has an extraordinary political intuition and he can play all cards at the same time. Despite his informal links with "formal" Islamists (e.g. the MB and al-Wasat Party), he is keen to portray himself as an "Islamic" thinker. The appeal of al-Awa originates not only from his appearance as an "elegant" upper-middle class gentleman but also from his intellectual credentials. His outstanding writings on Islam and Muslim issues exemplify a vital source for all Islamists. However, his political stance and tactics are precarious and counterproductive. While appealing to the public, he is bargaining with the military which has put his credibility at stake.

Paradoxically, the relationship among "informal" Islamists is loose and vague. Although they are profoundly rivals, they tend to act as buddies and partners. Each of them is intensely campaigning to get the presidential ticket. Even "informal" Islamists who are not running for the presidency are contesting to get authority over the public sphere. All together they usher a new era in Islamist politics that can be labeled "post-Institutional" Islamism.

Khalil al-Anani is a Scholar at the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University and former visiting fellow at the Brookings Institute. He can be reached at k.m.ibrahim@durham.ac.uk.

The Muslim Brotherhood's Presidential Gambit

By Marc Lynch, April 1, 2012

The Muslim Brotherhood resolved months of speculation this weekend by announcing its intention of nominating Deputy Supreme Guide Khairet el-Shater for Egypt's presidential election. It may not seem so surprising for a country's largest political force and the largest parliamentary faction to field a presidential candidate. But it was. The announcement sent an earthquake through Cairo's already wildly careening political scene. I'm happy to admit that I was taken by surprise.

What was the Brotherhood thinking? The nomination of Shater seems to have been a response to threats and opportunities a rapidly changing political arena, rather than the hatching of a long-term plan. But many Egyptians would disagree, seeing it instead as the culmination of a long-hatching conspiracy with the SCAF. I think it will reveal itself to be a strategic blunder which has placed the Brotherhood in a no-win situation. But clearly they had their reasons for making such an uncharacteristically bold move. How will it affect the endlessly turbulent and contentious Egyptian political transition? And could Khairat el-Shater really replace Hosni Mubarak as the president of Egypt?

I've been studying Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood for many years, and have interviewed most of its senior leaders (including Shater) multiple times. And I'll admit that I was surprised. So were most other MB-watchers I follow. That's in large part because it contradicts what I had heard for months from Brotherhood leaders in private and in public, and has dubious political logic. What's more, the decision appears to have been controversial inside the Brotherhood's leadership, and seems to have taken even many of its own top people by surprise. There are at least three reasons to consider the Brotherhood's move surprising, despite the obvious temptation that any political party would have to seek the top political position which it believes it can win: its promises to not field a candidate, the strategic risks of seeking the presidency, and the stakes of nominating Shater himself.

First, the Muslim Brotherhood had promised for months to not field a presidential candidate. They left little room for ambiguity in their promises. Indeed, it held this position so strongly that senior reformist leader Abed Moneim Aboul Futouh had broken bitterly with his organization over his determination to run, and the Brotherhood leadership had in turn threatened to expel any members who worked on his campaign. This was not a minor, off-handed promise — it had been a central, often-repeated feature of the Brotherhood's political message for many months.

The Brotherhood-bashing over this reversal may have been a bit over the top ("Boo hoo. Call the wahmbulance. Politics ain't beanbag," quipped **FP's** house cynic in response to the finger-pointing). But putting forward a candidate didn't simply break a frequently repeated public promise. It also fit a broader narrative (justified or not) about the Brotherhood's steadily creeping ambitions and broken vows. Many of these complaints were exaggerated, particularly over the Brotherhood's alleged conspiracies with the SCAF and over-performance in the parliamentary elections. But the accusations took on a new intensity in April as a wave of liberals and independents quit the constitutional assembly in protest over perceived Islamist domination.

The second reason for surprise was that the move carries significant political risks for little obvious advantage. The Brotherhood has long worried about the perception that it seeks to dominate Egyptian politics and sought to avoid triggering the crystallization of an anti-Islamist front. Most analysts expected the Brotherhood to practice self-restraint in order to avoid provoking these fears, and this was generally the message which Brotherhood leaders attempted to signal. But there's no question that the Brotherhood has become increasingly assertive as it has established its power in the transitional environment, and less willing to back away from confrontation or back away from its own preferences.

Advancing a candidate, while in line with this newly found willingness to flex its muscles, nevertheless creates a no-win situation for the Brotherhood. Backing an acceptable but non-Brotherhood presidential candidate would have protected their core interests without triggering fear in others. If a Brotherhood candidate wins, then the movement would control the parliament, the constitutional assembly, and the presidency. It would therefore stand alone in the face of the military, and would bear full responsibility for whatever happened in Egypt's economy, politics, and society in the coming period.

If it loses the election, then it would conclusively shatter its own carefully cultivated air of invincibility. And victory is not certain. I've been genuinely impressed with Shater's forceful presence, confidence, and intellect when I've interviewed him. In person, he is charismatic and impressive, calm and careful but capable of dominating a discussion. But Shater is not a charismatic front-man likely to enthrall the mass Egyptian public on television or in public speeches. He might find it tough going to unite an Islamist presidential field already divided, at least for now, between Aboul Fotouh, the surprisingly omnipresent Hazem Salah Abu Ismail, and Mohammed Salim al-Awa. In contrast to the parliamentary elections, Muslim Brotherhood members alone would not likely

be enough to carry the day in a high-turnout presidential election — and Shater has not proven an ability to appeal beyond the organization he dominates. Finally, his presence in the race could well galvanize the non-Islamist vote to rally behind a consensus candidate such as Amr Moussa.

The third reason for surprise was the candidate himself. If the Brotherhood needed to field a candidate, then it could have turned to one of its well-known political leaders. Choosing Khairat el-Shater raises the stakes considerably. Shater is the deputy supreme guide, and in the view of most MB-watchers the real power behind the throne. Either his victory or his defeat would have more serious potential negative repercussions for the Brotherhood as a whole than if a less central figure had been offered up as a candidate. There can be no doubting that with Shater, the Brotherhood has gone all-in for victory. And that in turn puts the organization's reputation very much on the line, win or lose.

So why did the Brotherhood do it? There are two, diametrically opposed arguments circulating — each, of course, firmly held as the obvious truth by its proponents. The first is that Brotherhood's hand had been forced by the SCAF's mismanagement of the political process and alleged targeting of the Brotherhood. Some Islamist leaders seemed to share overheated fears of an approaching "1954 moment" in which the army again cracked down on Islamists and reasserted authoritarian rule. While expected, the Brotherhood's attempts to use its parliamentary power to rein in the SCAF and the SCAF's counter-moves to block parliamentary action were, by this reading, pushing Egypt toward a political showdown. The MB has turned sharply against the Ganzoury government, after initially cooperating with it. Shater's nomination is therefore in this scenario a response to threat, the next step in an escalating conflict between the Brotherhood and the SCAF.

A second popular argument, held by many of the Brotherhood's critics, is precisely the opposite: that Shater's nomination represents the culmination of the long-standing collusion between the Brotherhood and the SCAF. In this reading, Shater's assuming the presidency will complete a bargain by which the former will be handed political power in exchange for guarantees of the latter's core interests. The public spats are dismissed as political theater designed to camouflage the conspiracy. But in this reading, the fix is in and the Brotherhood is set on seizing the opportunity.

The reality is likely some combination of threat and opportunity, as the Brotherhood seeks to navigate Egypt's turbulent politics. They may have preferred to find a candidate to support from outside the organization, but couldn't find a suitable one among the contenders. Perhaps they feared what the leading alternatives might do with regime power: Moussa perhaps rallying anti-Islamist forces and rolling back their gains, Abu Ismail capturing Islamist sympathies and votes and shunting the Brotherhood to the sidelines. They may have realized that they were at the peak of their power right now, with parliament under their control and other parties in disarray, and may never get another shot at the presidency. Or maybe it's all of the above, and more.

The months leading up to the presidential elections are going to be a wild period for Egyptian politics which will make or break its deeply troubled but still — just barely — viable transition. The constitution is supposedly to be drafted, the president elected, and power transferred from the SCAF to a civilian government within this short time frame. Meanwhile, the economy continues to badly struggle, frustrated activists continue to protest, and relations with the United States are badly strained. Shater's entry into the presidential race just introduces one more wild card into this loaded deck. At least Egyptian politics won't be boring.

Marc Lynch is associate professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University where he is the director of the Institute of Middle East Studies and Project on Middle East Political Science. Follow him @abuaardvark.

Egypt's "blessed" Salafi votes

By Khalil al-Anani, May 2, 2012

The green backyard at the Salafi sheikh's house in the old Mediterranean city of Alexandria was full of guests. They weren't students who came for religious lessons as usual but rather politicians appealing for the sheikh's political blessing in the presidential elections. It should be no surprise: Yasser Burhami, the ultraconservative Salafi leader and patron of al-Nour party, has become a key player in Egyptian politics. Ironically, in 2011, Burhami kept his distance from the Egyptian revolution and requested that his followers also do so. But now, he is deeply immersed in political strategy and tactics as he struggles to navigate the new terrain confronting the Salafi movement.

The Salafi movement's strategy has become clearer with its surprising decision to endorse the Islamist candidate Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh for Egypt's presidency. This was not an obvious call. The decision to choose Aboul Fotouh over the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate Mohamed Morsi or other possible contenders took weeks of negotiations and discussions within al-Dawa al-Salafiyya (the Salafi Call), the main political Salafi force in Egypt, and its political arm, al-Nour party. That decision has once again reshuffled Egypt's political cards — and offered new insight into where the Salafi movement is headed.

Conversations with trusted Salafi sources reveal a wide range of factors behind the Salafi decision to back Aboul Fotouh. The political partnership with Aboul Fotouh is based on mutual political interests, not ideological or religious affinities. Such a partnership will be tactical until both parties consolidate their relationship. A key political goal is to counterbalance the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), which they claim seeks a political monopoly over all institutions in Egypt. They also hope to avoid voting fragmentation among Salafis which would only benefit the "feloul" candidates (the remnants of the Mubarak regime), such as Amr Moussa and Ahmed Shafiq. "We were looking for a 'consensual' candidate who can unite Egyptians and has a clear vision to the future," a Salafi source said.

The calculations of the Salafis have also been shaped by the disqualifications of two leading candidates by Egypt's electoral commission. The disqualification of the popular Islamist candidate Hazem Saleh Abu Ismail "made our job easy," mentioned a high Salafi source. "We've managed to throw two birds by one stone: bargaining with Aboul Fotouh on the one hand, and overcoming an organizational and ideological burden on the other," referring to the internal rifts over Abu Ismail's candidacy. The disqualification of Muslim Brotherhood Deputy Supreme Guide Khairat el-Shater left the MB with Morsi, a less formidable candidate. Backing Morsi, they feared, would strengthen the MB position at the expense of the nascent Salafi movement. Alternatively, leaving the Salafi grassroots to decide on their candidate would risk causing organizational disintegration (plus losing a good card in the political game). For many Salafi leaders, therefore, the Aboul Fotouh card was the only way out of such a predicament despite their real concerns about Aboul Fotouh's liberal inclinations.

It is clear that politics, not ideology, dictated the Salafis' decision. Both Aboul Fotouh and the Salafis understand the consequences of such a decision, even if just for the short term. Yet the cost-benefit calculus led both to insist on making the deal. Aboul Fotouh will get the political, organizational, and social support of the Salafis, particularly in the rural areas that are difficult to reach. And the Salafis will get a friendly president who will secure them a say in high politics even if he is not from their own movement. Contrary to the stereotypical image of Salafis as "ultraconservative religious monsters," religion had almost no weight in their decision to endorse Aboul Fotouh. As Nader Bakar, an outspoken young Salafi leader, blatantly put it, "we were looking for a president who can be a mere executive manager not an Islamic caliph."

The mechanism behind the decision is another astonishing development in the Salafis' dynamics. Known by their regressive stance on democracy, the vote for Aboul Fotouh was internally democratic, although it was under the banner of the religious rule "the mandatory Shura." Both al-Nour and al-Dawa al-Salaffiyya held internal elections to vote over which candidate they would endorse in the presidential race. According to many sources and media coverage, the voting process was transparent and clean. Firstly, they held an election debate between Islamist candidates including Mohamed Morsi and Mohamed Selim al-Awa, as well as an aide, Ibrahim el-Zafaria (a former MB member), delegated by Aboul Foutoh who could not attend. After the debate, the candidates and their aides left and the voting process started. To avoid any biased pressures on members' decisions, they segregated both institutions, al-Nour's high commission and its parliamentary bloc (105 members), and the Consultative Council of al-Dawa al-Salafiyya (150 out of 204 members voted). And the elections were conducted simultaneously in two different rooms. Aboul Fotouh received 70 and 80 percent of the votes from the institutions respectively.

The gains for the Salafis for endorsing Aboul Fotouh are enormous. First, it will re-position al-Nour and its patron at the heart of the political process in Egypt particularly if Aboul Fotouh wins the elections. Backing Aboul Fotouh, who is relatively without an institutional or social base, will secure a foothold for the Salafis in Egyptian politics. Second, the decision will increase the public appeal and respect for Salafis. It resonates with popular aspirations to have a revolutionary and "consensual" president like Aboul Fotouh. The process behind the decision offers a stark comparison between the MB and Salafis on internal transparency and democracy. Third, the decision will inevitably hurt the MB's image and political weight. On one hand, it shows the MB as the heartless movement that expelled Aboul Fotouh whereas Salafis safeguarded him. On the other hand, it will increase the alienation and isolation of the MB particularly within the Islamist context. Moreover, the Salafis' backing of Aboul Fotouh will have a significant impact on a large constituency of undecided voters, especially among low and lower-middle class voters. However most notably, the endorsement of Aboul Fotouh hasn't only revealed the Salafis' increasing political savvy and shrewdness, but also proved that politics, not piety will reshape their future.

Khalil al-Anani is a scholar of Middle East Politics at the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University and former visiting fellow at the Brookings Institute in Washington, DC. He can be reach at: kalanani@gmail.com.

A Man for All Seasons

By Shadi Hamid, May 9, 2012

In January, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh was a long shot to become Egypt's next president. When I walked into the Islamist candidate's basement in a far-flung Cairo suburb — which was doubling as a "backup" headquarters — it made me think back to the early, insurgent days of Barack Obama's campaign, when Hillary Clinton was still the presumptive Democratic nominee. The basement, with its large spare rooms, was packed with young volunteers. It had a chaotic, bustling feel. Aboul Fotouh's supporters may have hailed from radically different backgrounds, but they believed, above all, in the candidate. They wanted to transcend the old battle lines of "Islamist" or "liberal" and reimagine Egyptian politics in the process.

What those grand ambitions mean in practice is, at times, unclear. As Aboul Fotouh has risen to front-runner status in the first ever competitive presidential election in Egypt's history, he has become the Rorschach test of Egyptian politics. Liberals think he's more liberal than he actually is. Conservatives hope he's more conservative.

It's an understatement to say that the Aboul Fotouh campaign is a big-tent movement. A former leader in the Muslim Brotherhood and, for decades, one of Egypt's most prominent Islamist figures, he has become the standard-bearer of many of the young liberals who led Egypt's revolution — including Google executive Wael Ghonim. He is also, however, the preferred candidate of the country's hard-line Salafi groups, including the al-Nour Party and its parent organization al-Dawa al-Salafiya, one of Egypt's largest religious movements. This is all the more impressive considering that, unlike the United States or most European countries, the primary political cleavage in Egypt has little to do with economics and much more to do with religion.

Aboul Fotouh's success stems in part from his ability to neutralize this religious divide. One of his messages — and one that has appeal for liberals and hard-line Islamists alike — is this: We are all, in effect, Islamists, so why fight over it? As he explained to a Salafi television channel in February, "Today those who call themselves liberals or leftists, this is just a political name, but most of them understand and respect Islamic values. They support the sharia and are no longer against it." In a creative attempt at redefinition, Aboul Fotouh noted that all Muslims are, by definition, Salafi, in the sense that they are loyal to the Salaf, the earliest, most pious generations of Muslims.

Aboul Fotouh is able to make this argument, and make it sound convincing, in part because of who he is. He is the rare figure who has been, at various points in his career, a Salafi, a Muslim Brother, and, today, a Turkish-style "liberal Islamist." In the 1970s, he rose to prominence as a leader and founder of al-Gamaa al-Islamiya, the religious movement that wrested control over universities from the once dominant leftists. In his memoirs, Aboul Fotouh recalls the early Salafi influence on his ideas: He and his fellow students aggressively promoted sex segregation on campus. At one point, they tried to "prove" to the Muslim Brotherhood's leader at the time, Umar al-Tilmisani, that music was *haram*, or forbidden by Islam.

Over the course of the decade, Aboul Fotouh developed close relationships with those who would later become the leading lights of Salafi thought. After the 2011 revolution, Aboul Fotouh, then in the process of splitting with the Brotherhood, was one of the few politicians to take Salafists seriously. It helped that he knew them. While the Muslim Brotherhood tended to treat Salafists as immature, younger brothers in the Islamic family, Aboul Fotouh exaggerated their power — he once claimed that Salafists outnumbered Muslim Brothers 20-to-1 — and pledged to seek their vote. Respect, it turns out, can go much further than ideological proximity.

But the ideological tensions within the Islamist camp remain, even if Aboul Fotouh's message tends to paper them over. According to him, all Islamists agree on the *usul* (the "fundamentals") but differ on the *furu* (the "specifics") of religious practice. In his February interview on Salafi television, he estimated, implausibly, that Islamists agree on 99 percent of the issues.

Thus far, his liberal supporters have dismissed such comments or explained them away. Part of it is the lack of alternatives. The other front-runner, former Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, is seen as *felool*, a derogatory term used to describe "remnants" of the old regime. Part of it, however, is that they really seem to believe Aboul Fotouh is who they want him to be. Although Aboul Fotouh is adamantly an Islamist, he has also broken with his former organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, and other Islamists on key issues. Last year, for instance, Aboul Fotouh asserted that a Muslim has the right to convert to Christianity — a particularly controversial position for a presidential candidate to take, given that most Sunni scholars hold that the punishment for apostasy is death.

Aboul Fotouh has often insisted on the dangers of mixing preaching and party politics, a position that appeals to liberals as well as some Islamists. When I met with him in 2010 at the height of the Mubarak regime's repression — and just months before the most rigged parliamentary elections in Egyptian history — he spoke at length about the need to separate the two. The Muslim Brotherhood, he said, can deal with political issues but should leave competition over power to political parties.

"Putting religion and political authority within one hand is very dangerous. That's what happened in Iran," he told me, peppering his measured Arabic with choice English words for added emphasis. "Historically, famous preachers were not part of the power structure. It's these [autocratic] regimes who put the two together — putting al-Azhar [the preeminent center of Islamic learning] under the control of the state."

Aboul Fotouh consistently valued the Muslim Brotherhood's social and evangelical work over its accumulation of political power. In July 2008, I asked him what would happen if Hosni Mubarak's regime shut the Brotherhood out of parliament. Faced with the prospect of even more repression, he seemed surprisingly calm. "The Muslim Brotherhood is a social movement in the first place. Its presence in parliament is useful and good, but lack of parliamentary representation does not have an existential effect on the Brotherhood. From 1970 to 1984, we weren't in parliament, and they were 14 of the most active years for the Brotherhood's work of preaching and education."

In this respect, Aboul Fotouh is an old-school Islamist, seeing himself as a faithful heir to Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna's legacy. According to its bylaws, the group's original aim was "to raise a generation of Muslims who would understand Islam correctly and act according to its teachings." Until 1934, the bylaws forbade direct political action. Decades later, General Guide Tilmisani, fearing party politics would corrupt the Brotherhood's soul, prevented the organization from contesting parliamentary elections for many years.

There is a tension, however, between Aboul Fotouh's sometimes liberal pronouncements and his essentially majoritarian understanding of democracy. When I sat down with Aboul Fotouh for the first time in the summer of 2006, I wanted to understand his philosophy of government, to the extent that he had one. He repeatedly emphasized that the people, represented by a freely elected parliament, are the source of authority. On the thorny question, however, of what Islamists would do if parliament passed an "un-Islamic" law, he dismissed the concern: "The parliament won't grant rights to gays because that goes against the prevailing culture of society, and if [members of parliament] did that, they'd lose the next election," he explained. "Whether you are a communist, socialist, or whatever, you can't go against the prevailing culture. There is already a built-in respect for sharia."

This notion has a long pedigree in Islamic thought: Prophet Mohammed is believed to have said, "My *ummah* [community] will not agree on an error." Likewise, Aboul Fotouh was confident that once Egyptian society was free, the best ideas would rise to the top. There was little need, then, to regulate society from the top down. On their own, without government getting too much in the way, Egyptians would do the right thing. And this would inevitably help Islam. "What happens in a free society?" Aboul Fotouh went on. "I hold conferences and spread my ideas through newspapers and television to try to bring public opinion closer to me.… We have confidence in what we believe."

If people are looking for a consistent strain in Aboul Fotouh's thought, it is this: that Islam has already won out and will continue to win out. Islam is a source of unity and national strength rather than one of division. Depending on where exactly an Egyptian voter stands, this is either reassuring and somewhat banal, or mildly frightening, particularly for the country's Christian minority.

Nevertheless, it is an idea with analogues elsewhere in the region, most notably in Turkey and Tunisia, where "moderate" Islamists came to power by tapping into a religious mainstream that had lost faith in the secular project of previous decades. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, for example, used democratization to strengthen the place of Islam in public life. He embraced European Union accession talks while knowing full well that the required liberal reforms would weaken the military's influence and empower Islamic currents in a country where the right to openly express religious values had been severely curtailed. In Tunisia, Rached Ghannouchi and his Ennahda party have backed off from demands that Islamic law be enshrined in the Tunisian Constitution, perhaps knowing that Islamization of Tunisian society is already well under way, regardless of what the Tunisian Constitution says.

Indeed, the same attacks that follow Aboul Fotouh's counterparts in Turkey and Tunisia will be used against him: that he is a proponent of "stealth Islamization" and that he remains faithful to the project of applying sharia. The critics might be right. If Aboul Fotouh becomes president, there will be a battle — between his liberal, revolutionary supporters and his Islamist backers — over the direction his presidency takes. Now that the major Salafi organizations have endorsed him, they are likely to have significant influence in an Aboul Fotouh administration, pushing his presidency to the right on social and moral issues.

But though Salafists are a critical bloc of support for the Aboul Fotouh campaign, they have little presence in the candidate's inner circle and campaign organization, which is composed mostly of ex-Muslim Brotherhood members, liberals, and revolutionary youth. One of Aboul Fotouh's closest aides is Rabab El-Mahdi, a Marxist political science professor, who says her "biggest project" is ending the Islamist-secularist divide and focusing on the bread-and-butter issues that actually matter in people's lives. Another is the 30-year-old Ali El-Bahnasawy, a self-described liberal who is Aboul Fotouh's media advisor. He told me that the Salafists' endorsement was "amazing" and credited them for realizing that "Egypt needs to end the polarization in the country now." For him, this is the essence of Aboul Fotouh's appeal. "We need someone," Bahnasawy said, "who can talk to the Islamists and speak their language and talk to the liberals and gain their trust as well."

The popularity of Aboul Fotouh's campaign is partly a reaction to growing polarization in Egypt, where fears abound of an "Algeria scenario" of annulled elections, dissolved parliaments, and military coups. But just as the high hopes of the Obama campaign were dashed by the political compromises inherent in governing, an Aboul Fotouh administration may find it difficult to transcend the basic realities of Egyptian political life. If he wins, his supporters will soon find that the divisions between Egypt's feuding political currents do not dissipate quickly, if at all.

It is perhaps telling that Aboul Fotouh's rise comes at a time when religious belief has become an easy substitute for real discussion on economic recovery, security-sector reform, or how to fight income inequality. For the vast majority of Egyptians, the debate over sharia has been utterly beside the point. It is an elite debate and, in some ways, a manufactured one. As Aboul Fotouh will be the first to say, all major political forces support Article 2 of the Egyptian Constitution, which states that the "principles of the Islamic sharia are the primary source of legislation." Even the most "secular" party — the Free Egyptians — took to campaigning in rural areas with banners reading "The Quran Is Our Constitution." Meanwhile, it was the Salafists, and not the more moderate Muslim Brotherhood, who entered into serious negotiations over forming a parliamentary coalition with liberal parties. As a senior official in the Salafi al-Nour Party once put it to me, "Here in Egypt, even the liberals are conservatives."

Sharia has become the "hope and change" of Egyptian politics — all say they like it, but no one quite knows what it means. As the most powerful man in Egypt and with a bully pulpit to match, Egypt's first revolutionary president will have a fleeting opportunity to redefine the meaning of Islam in public life.

In the introduction to his electoral program, Aboul Fotouh, the candidate, embraces the application of sharia. But there's a caveat: "The understanding of implementation of Islamic law is not, as some people think, about applying the *hudud* punishments [such as cutting of the hands of thieves]," the program reads. "In its complete understanding, Islamic law has to do with realizing the essential and urgent needs of humankind." The program then goes on to list combating poverty and fighting corruption as two fundamental components of applying Islamic law. For Aboul Fotouh, sharia is both everything and nothing all at once. For now at least, that seems to be exactly the way he wants it.

Shadi Hamid is director of research at the Brookings Doha Center and a fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. You can follow him on Twitter: @shadihamid.

Brother Number One

By Shadi Hamid, June 7, 2012

Egypt is on the cusp of its first real experiment in Islamist governance. If the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi comes out on top in the upcoming presidential runoff election, scheduled for June 16 and 17, the venerable Islamist movement will have won control of both Egypt's presidency and its parliament, and it will have a very real chance to implement its agenda of market-driven economic recovery, gradual Islamization, and the reassertion of Egypt's regional role.

Over the course of Egypt's troubled transition, the Brotherhood has become increasingly, and uncharacteristically, assertive in its political approach. Renouncing promises not to seek the presidency and entering into an overt confrontation with the ruling military council, the Brotherhood's bid to "save the revolution" has been interpreted by others as an all-out power grab. Egypt's liberals, as well as the United States, now worry about the implications of unchecked Brotherhood rule and what that might mean for their interests.

Things couldn't have been more different two years ago. Under the repression of Hosni Mubarak's regime, the Brotherhood's unofficial motto was "participation, not domination." The group was renowned for its caution and patient (some would say too patient) approach to politics. When I sat down with Morsi in May 2010 — just months before the revolution and well before he could have ever imagined being Mubarak's successor — he echoed the leadership's almost stubborn belief in glacial but steady change. He even objected to a fairly anodyne description of the movement's political activities: "The word 'opposition' has the connotation of seeking power," Morsi told me then. "But, at this moment, we are not seeking power because [that] requires preparation, and society is not prepared." The Muslim Brotherhood, being a religious movement more than a political party, had the benefit of a long horizon.

Morsi wasn't well known back then. He was an important player in the Brotherhood, but did not seem to have a particularly distinctive set of views. He was a loyalist, an enforcer, and an operator. And he was arguably good at those things. But being, or becoming, a leader is a different matter. Despite heading the Brotherhood's parliamentary bloc and later leading the group's newly formed Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), Morsi struggled to command respect across ideological lines. He rarely spoke like someone who liked making concessions or doing the hard work necessary for building consensus.

Like many Brotherhood leaders, he nurtured a degree of resentment toward Egypt's liberals. They were tiny and irrelevant, the thinking went, so why were they always asking for so much? In May 2010, the opposition seemed to be coming alive, but in a uniquely Egyptian way. At one protest in Tahrir Square, each group — Islamists, liberals, and leftists — huddled in its own part of the square. I asked Morsi why there wasn't greater cooperation between Islamists and liberals. "That depends on the other side," he said, echoing what the liberals were saying about the Brotherhood.

This thinly veiled disdain could be papered over when liberals, leftists, and Brotherhood members were facing a dictator they all hated. And, during the revolution, Brotherhood members, Salafists, liberals, and ordinary Egyptians joined hands and put the old divisions aside — if only for a moment. When Mubarak fell, though, there was little left to unite them.

The international community, particularly the United States, shares the liberals' fear of Islamist domination, but for a very different set of reasons. Historically, the Brotherhood has been one of the more consistent purveyors of anti-American and anti-Israeli sentiment. While some Brotherhood leaders, particularly lead strategist Khairat El Shater, are less strident in their condemnations and less willfully creative with their conspiracy theories in private, Morsi is not. In a conversation with me, he volunteered his views on the 9/11 terrorist attacks without any prompting. "When you come and tell me that the plane hit the tower like a knife in butter," he said, shifting to English, "then you are insulting us. How did the plane cut through the steel like this? Something must have happened from the inside. It's impossible."

According to various polls, such views are held by most Egyptians, including leftists and liberals, but that doesn't make them any less troubling. It is perhaps ironic, then, that out of the Brotherhood's top officials, Morsi has spent the most time in the United States. He is a graduate of the University of Southern California and, interestingly, the father of two U.S. citizens — a reminder that familiarity can sometimes breed contempt. At a recent news conference, Morsi discussed his time living abroad, painting a picture of a society in moral decay, featuring crumbling families, young mothers in hospitals who have to "write in the name of the father," and couples living together out of wedlock. We don't have these problems in Egypt, he said, his voice rising with a mixture of pride and resentment.

I met Morsi again, a year later in May 2011, at the Brotherhood's new, plush headquarters in Muqattam, nestled on a small mountain on Cairo's outskirts. The Brotherhood leader seemed surprisingly calm. He punctuated his Arabic with English expressions; he made jokes (they weren't necessarily funny), name-checked the 1978 film *The Deer Hunter*, and even did an impromptu impression of a former U.S. president. In the early days, in the afterglow of the 18-day uprising, the group's leaders were still careful to say the right things. He was quick to point out that 2,500 of the FJP's 9,000 founding members were not from the Brotherhood, and included Christians.

He was also dismissive of ultraconservative Salafi movements. They weren't politically mature yet, he said. The implication was obvious: The Brotherhood, unlike the Salafists, had spent decades first learning and then playing — rather skillfully at times — the

game of politics. They learned how and when to compromise and how to justify it to their conservative base. Now, nearly 28 years after first entering parliament in 1984, the group was taking pains to present itself as the moderate, respectable face of political Islam.

But the Brotherhood soon realized that it had stumbled upon one of those rare moments where a country's politics are truly open and undefined. So they decided to seize it, alienating many of their erstwhile liberal allies in the process. This approach was a good fit with the Brotherhood's distinctly majoritarian approach to democracy: They had won a decisive popular mandate in the parliamentary elections, with 47 percent of the vote, so why shouldn't they rule?

Eventually, the Brotherhood decided to go for broke. "We have witnessed obstacles standing in the way of parliament to take decisions to achieve the demands of the revolution," Morsi said in March. "We have therefore chosen the path of the presidency not because we are greedy for power but because we have a majority in parliament which is unable to fulfill its duties."

The more important question is: Does it really matter what Morsi thinks? The Brotherhood's presidential campaign was never about Morsi. It was about the Brotherhood, and Morsi just happened to be the substitute candidate — an unlikely accident of history — after the charismatic Shater was disqualified from the race. This is what makes it difficult to assess a Morsi presidency. Over the past year, Shater's personal office has become the address for a steady stream of big-shot investors and visiting dignitaries, including senior U.S. officials. Those who have met him have come out both impressed and reassured.

It was Shater who plucked Morsi from relative obscurity to join the Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau, the organization's top decision-making body, and then selected him to lead the Brotherhood's political arm. Up until now, there has been little daylight between the two men. But will Shater be able to maintain his sway if Morsi ascends to Egypt's highest office? Some Brotherhood members are already chafing at the idea of Shater — whom supporters and detractors alike portray as a brilliant but domineering operative —

serving as the power behind the throne: "If Morsi is able to free himself from the shadow of Shater, his policies will be balanced. If Shater stays in control, Morsi will become increasingly unpopular and fail to govern effectively," one Brotherhood member who has worked with both figures told me. "Will Morsi become the son who surpassed the father?"

On the campaign trail, Morsi has proved a quick study and a hard worker. Campaign aides have worked to repackage him, coaching him on his speaking style and how to use his hands in interviews. In the process, the candidate has grown more confident — and it's starting to show. His May 30 appearance on Yosri Fouda's television program showed a surprisingly fluent speaker, a far cry from his earlier, shaky media appearances. As one Brotherhood member remarked, "The new Morsi of today is different from the person I knew."

Although Morsi outperformed most polls in coming out on top in the first round of elections, for the Brotherhood, his 25 percent share of the vote amounted to something of a shock. The group's internal projections, based on polling conducted weeks before the vote, saw Morsi with a commanding lead — it was only a question of how close he would get to 50 percent. Morsi's lack of charisma — as well as the lack of respect he commands among non-Islamists — was part of the reason for his disappointing showing. But it was also the result of a series of more serious mistakes and miscalculations. Brotherhood officials had become detached from the changing tenor in the group's former strongholds in the Nile Delta, where the Brotherhood was overtaken by Ahmed Shafiq, Mubarak's last prime minister. The Islamist-dominated parliament had failed to pass the sweeping reform legislation that many had expected. Most controversial was an attempt to stack the constituent assembly with Brotherhood supporters, a classic case of political overreach.

After the revolution, the Brotherhood — like so many other political forces in Egypt's toxic political scene — became consumed by paranoia, fearing that some combination of liberals, leftists, and old regime elements were out to get them. A democratic opening, as welcome as it was, came with its own risks. The rise of Brotherhood defector Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh as a viable candidate was seen as an unprecedented threat to organizational unity and discipline.

This paranoia, mixed with an old-fashioned dose of political cynicism, seeped into the group's discourse on foreign policy. When Egypt's ruling military council lifted a travel ban on American NGO workers in an attempt to defuse a political crisis, the Brotherhood-led parliament pounced, using the episode to call for a no-confidence vote and demand the removal of the military-appointed government. Brotherhood parliamentarians blamed the Egyptian government for giving into American pressure and called on Egypt to refuse U.S. aid. "I wish members of the U.S. Congress could listen to you now to realize that this is the parliament of the revolution, which does not allow a breach of the nation's sovereignty or interference in its affairs," said parliament speaker Saad al-Katatni, a leading Brotherhood figure, in reaction to the debate.

The Brotherhood has found itself doing a difficult dance, thinking one thing in private and saying another in public. Such mixed messages are also a function of the love-hate schizophrenia that many Brotherhood members — and Egyptians in general — seem to display toward the United States. I remember the early days of Barack Obama's presidency, when Brotherhood officials would complain bitterly about the White House's disinterest in democracy promotion. "For Obama, the issue of democracy is 15th on his list of priorities," one Brotherhood official told me in May 2010. "There's no moment of change like there was under Bush."

It is true that the Brotherhood, along with most of Egypt, hates particular U.S. policies, particularly those related to Palestine. It also tends to think that somehow — usually through creative, indirect means — the United States is responsible for various nefarious plots against Egypt. But that doesn't mean that a Brotherhood-dominated government would immediately reorder Cairo's international alliances. For all the public vitriol, the Brotherhood actually feels more comfortable with America than it does with America's adversaries: "The U.S. is a superpower that is there and will be there, and it is not to anyone's benefit to have this superpower going down, but we want it to go up with its values and not with its dark side," one senior Brotherhood official told me. "What are the values driving China across the globe?… It's just pure profit. The Russians and the Chinese, I don't know their values! Western European and American core values of human rights and pluralism — we practiced this when we were living there."

Values aside, a Morsi administration simply would not be able to afford a rupture in relations with the United States. A Muslim Brotherhood-led Egypt will need to rebuild its deteriorating economy, and U.S. and European loans, assistance, and investment will be crucial to this effort. There's also no certainty that a President Morsi could drastically alter Egypt's foreign policy even if he wanted to — regardless of what Egypt's new constitution says, the military and the intelligence services will continue to exercise veto power over critical defense and national security issues.

While there are limits to how much the Brotherhood can alter Egypt's foreign policy, there are also limits to how far it can go in satisfying U.S. concerns. As Egypt becomes more democratic, elected leaders will have no choice but to heed popular sentiment on foreign policy. And in an otherwise divided polity, the only real area of consensus is the need for an independent, assertive foreign policy that re-establishes Egypt's leading role in the region. That means tension and disagreement with the United States will become a normal feature of the bilateral relationship. The model to look to is Turkey, led by the Islamically oriented Justice and Development Party, which has employed anti-Israel rhetoric to useful domestic effect.

The effect of a Morsi presidency on domestic policy is similarly hazy. Egypt's byzantine bureaucracy remains stocked with Mubarak loyalists and could block any changes that Morsi tries to push through. As a former political advisor to the Brotherhood predicted to me, the "state machinery will devour him." To further confuse matters, Morsi is one of the rare presidential candidates who believes in limiting the power of his own office. In his TV interview with Fouda, he again stated his preference: an interim period with a mixed presidential-parliamentary system, which would pave the way for a system in which the legislature held complete sway. A Brotherhood-led assembly is set to draft a constitution that will define the relative powers of elected institutions.

But, of course, Morsi's opinion on the matter could change once he became president. The Muslim Brotherhood's first experience in governance will be an experiment, and one the organization may not be prepared for. Elections have consequences. We just don't know what they'll be. And, for that matter, neither does Morsi.

Shadi Hamid is director of research at the Brookings Doha Center and a fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. You can follow him on Twitter: @shadihamid.


الحرية والعدالة
لحمل الخير لمصر
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Chapter 5

YEMEN

Yemen's Islamists and the Revolution

By Laurent Bonnefoy, February 9, 2012

Islamist movements did not start Yemen's revolution, but they have loomed large over its fate. Tawakkol Karman, an ex-member of Islah, a coalition party that includes Yemen's Muslim Brotherhood, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for her tireless political campaigning. Backers of outgoing President Ali Abdullah Saleh warned of the inexorable rise of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), even after the killing of ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki by a U.S. drone.

But as in much of the Arab world, the Yemeni revolution has presented both opportunities and challenges to its Islamists. At least five different Islamist trends have played important roles in the unfolding events — and some have fared better than others. Those struggling to help Yemen's political transition must recognize the diversity and internal struggles among these Islamist trends, and be prepared to engage with them as part of the country's political landscape.

The Islamist trend most directly involved in the popular revolution is undoubtedly the Islah party. Islah qualifies as the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, but should be understood as a coalition that includes conservative tribal leaders and prominent businessmen. Islah began as a rather reluctant supporter of the "revolutionary youth" which was calling for the departure of Ali Abdullah Saleh in the early days of 2011. As a key part of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), the platform of the unified opposition established since the early 2000s, Islah appeared to be willing to make compromises and accept dialogue with the regime, then becoming its main interlocutor.

As Saleh appeared to be losing grip in the late spring, however, Islah moved to capture a position as a central actor of the revolutionary process. Its mobilizing capacity through its mosques, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and activists ended up restructuring much of the revolution, both physically on Change Square in Sanaa, and in terms of agenda. No other structure or movement seemed able to compete with it. This has made Islah a key broker in the political gamesmanship unfolding over the transition, even as "revolutionary youth" complain that it has hijacked the revolution.

Sensitive to such critiques, Islah's leadership appears to have been willing to leave other players in the front row. It did not claim the position of prime minister of the national unity government that was announced in November 2011. But there should be no doubts about Islah's capacity to mobilize electors massively when general elections are organized. The movement, with its tribal allies, is also trying hard to challenge the narrative according to which alternatives to Saleh are inexistent or are lacking responsibility.

A less well-understood trend is the quietist Salafis, with Yahya al-Hajuri of Dar al-Hadith institute in Dammaj at their head, who have reasserted their stance of loyalty to the regime in order to fight what they describe as a chaotic situation. This branch of

Salafism has played hard to delegitimize in religious terms the popular uprising, stigmatizing the "revolutionary youth" as well as the Muslim Brotherhood for encouraging a process whose main beneficiaries are, in their eyes, the "enemies of Islam." Appearing as the last supporters of the regime may end up being costly in the long run but could also see the quietist Salafis emerge as the popular advocates of stability should the situation deteriorate significantly. Indeed, while precise data is hard to come by, it appears that the quietist Salafis have been losing ground over the past year.

But the Salafis too are changing in the face of popular revolution. An offshoot of the quietist branch of Salafism has been increasingly engaging in political activities for the last few years, neglecting issues of loyalty and criticism of party politics (*hizbiyya*). These politicized Salafis see the Yemeni revolutionary process as a new opportunity for overt engagement in the political sphere. With the revolution, members of the Hikma and Ihsan associations, likely emboldened by the success of al-Nour party in Egypt, have announced projects to create parties and participate in upcoming elections. Among them, Aqil al-Maqtari, with important support in Taiz, has established the League for Renaissance and Change. Despite being fragmented along regional lines, these initiatives are significant and politicized Salafis are likely to emerge as a new political force, one that analysts will need in the near future to understand beyond criminalizing stereotypes.

Another trend are the jihadist movements, which are more or less linked to AQAP. They have engaged in a variety of processes that have to a certain extent normalized them, fully embedding these actors in the Yemeni context and in what can be labeled a continuum of violence, particularly in the southern governorates. They have used the revolutionary events to legitimize their own historical narrative. This process has changed the meaning of an "al Qaeda" militant in Yemen and leaves space for possible interactions and dialogue with other social and political actors.

Jihadi sympathizers have gained some control over territory in part because of the growing disorganization of the central state and of its shrinking military resources. Effective control over territory (in Jaar for instance) has favored a change in focus toward

fighting a guerilla war against the regime and its allies and, at the local level, developing public policies addressing grievances of the population. Such a shift (which should not only be understood as the result of the assassination in September 2011 of Anwar al-Awlaki, the so-called mastermind of the transnational outreach of AQAP) has in a way transferred militant energy and resources on the Yemeni agenda. This process, which is not necessarily centralized or self-conscious, is likely to gain momentum and highlights that confrontation, repression, and the drone attacks strategies are hardly able to address the complexity of the issues that are at stake in revolutionary Yemen.

At another end of the Islamist spectrum, Zaidi revivalists (drawing from a Shiite background) with the so-called "Houthi movement" have also been directly affected by the revolutionary process. Over the course of 2011, the diminishing military capacity of the regime has forced it to focus on the capital, Sanaa, and therefore, in effect, to abandon much of the Saada governorate and its surroundings to the Houthi rebels it had been fighting since 2004. The Houthi leadership has simultaneously taken divergent options — claiming to accept to play the institutional game including, for instance, by favoring the initiative of Muhammad Miftah to establish the Ummah party or letting some of its sympathizers reach out on Change Square in Sanaa toward non-Zaidi activists, while at the same time engaging in violence with competing Sunni Islamist groups, particularly quietist Salafis in Dammaj or members of Islah in al-Jawf.

The long-running, intense Yemeni crisis is thus radically reshaping the opportunities and the challenges to all Islamist trends. These movements are likely to continue being central actors at the national level and to emerge as necessary interlocutors at the international level. The most significant trend today appears to be one drawing, in the long run, the various Islamist movements toward greater institutionalization, inclusion in the political process, and eventually participation in future elections. But if that political process fails to take hold, the potential for mayhem and armed confrontation should not be neglected, including in the form of inter-sectarian warfare.

Both diverging outcomes obviously depend on internal variables and on the attitudes of Yemenis. But international actors can make a difference. The West should acknowledge the popular legitimacy of these Islamist movements, as well as their great internal diversity, and be prepared to engage with them as an important part of Yemen's future.

Laurent Bonnefoy is a researcher based in the Levant at the Institut français du Proche-Orient, and author of "Salafism in Yemen: Transnationalism and Religious Identity" (Columbia University Press).

Yemen's Houthi movement and the revolution

By Madeleine Wells, February 27, 2012

Walking in January into the Shabaab al-Sumud tent in Yemen's Maydan Taghayr — Change Square — I was greeted by eager faces and talkative qat chewers. "We love Americans," a Houthi supporter nodded his head vigorously, and, in doing so, revealed an enormous poster on the tent flap behind him on which the group's infamous slogan was inscribed: "God is Great, Death to America, Death to Israel, a curse on the Jews." Seeing my eyes widen, he offered, "We hate American *policies*, not *people*. The roots of the slogan lie in America's war on the Iraqi people and support for Israeli policies against the Palestinians. Let me tell you what it is that the Houthis want..."

Even the dedicated observer of Yemeni affairs can be forgiven for not fully grasping the complexity of the country's political milieu during this shaky revolutionary period. Researching Yemeni politics, one often feels stuck in an intractable game of telephone. Part of this is the grammar of how information spreads in the Middle East, which is often informal and decentralized. But part of it can be related to the political ecology of the country and the palpable gap between the geographical center and periphery. The history of the political evolution of the Shiite "Houthi" rebels of Saada province is no different. Unraveling what the Houthis want may indicate how other independent and marginalized groups, like the southern separatists, will navigate a post-Saleh Yemen. The political integration of the Houthis is one among the myriad problems faced by newly minted President Abed Rabbo Mansour al-Hadi, who underwent his official installation ceremony on February 27 in Sanaa. An assessment of Houthi interests also suggests a larger difference than we realize between the opposition movements in cities like Sanaa, Taiz, and Aden, and the supporters they claim to represent in rural areas.

Even before the mass protest movement calling for Ali Abdullah Saleh's immediate ouster began heating in the spring of 2011 — long before dozens of provincial officers quit their post or before there were battles between security forces and protesters from the Saudi Arabian border to Aden — Yemen's central government exercised very limited control over vast swaths of Yemeni territory. In many provinces, the Yemeni army has occupied little more than walled military garrisons, and officers often had to ask permission from local sheikhs before embarking on missions. However, Saleh's regime has regularly attempted to brutally impose authority over many of these regions. One area in which this strategy backfired is the northwest most province of Saada — a rugged region in northern Yemen along the Saudi Arabian border. Starting in 2004, the war between Yemen's central government and the rebels, called "Houthis" after their assassinated leader, has displaced upwards of 300,000 people, destroyed Zaidi religious sites, and disrupted age-old systems of tribal conflict mediation. The on again off again conflict has spilled over into Hajjah, Amran, and al-Jawf provinces, and even incited a brief Saudi air campaign in 2009. Throughout the war, Saleh's regime arrested and forcibly disappeared people from Yemen's northern provinces and Sanaa thought to be connected to the Houthis, clogging the judiciary system and the jails with hundreds of prisoners related to this conflict.

As my co-authors and I argued in a 2010 RAND report, the violence in the north damaged "entire communities and local economies... [causing] first-order effects in the realm of human security and possible negative consequences for the resilience of cultural norms that might, in other cases, diminish conflict."

Saleh rallied support for the war first by casting the Houthis as proto-Hezbollah foot soldiers for Iran — a spurious claim dismissing that Houthis are Zaidis and follow a doctrine quite different from Iranians and Lebanese Shiites — and then by painting them as separatists and terrorists. Despite the Houthis' rather unsavory slogan, their early stated goals included regional autonomy, not separatism, and freedom of religious Shiite education, which made them the enemy of radical Sunni Salafis and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). While those worried about Houthi secessionism have pointed to their long-standing and recently renewed links with the southern secessionist Hirak movement, the Houthis describe themselves as *independents* in a rapidly changing political process, *not* secessionists. There are still basic military garrisons and border guards in Houthi-controlled areas in the north, but the Houthis are at peace with these forces. If they wanted to secede, the argument goes, they would have expelled the remaining forces last year. Indeed, after the protest movement began in February 2011, Saleh withdrew his fighting garrisons from the region in order to concentrate on his tough luck in Sanaa. Seeing an opportunity amidst the chaos, the movement's charismatic leader, Abdalmalik al-Houthi, immediately sent unarmed Houthi supporters down to Sanaa to participate in the revolution.

On the one hand, city-dwelling, college-educated 20 and 30-somethings sit in several pro-Houthi tents at Taghayr 24/7, watching generator-powered al-Arabiya, and waxing rhapsodic about democracy, equality, and justice. A few of these youths have been arrested for supporting the Houthis, and some have even visited Saada. But for the most part, the pro-Houthi Shabab al-Sumud (literally "Steadfast Youth") tent is frequented by Zaidi youth from urban areas like Taiz and Sanaa who have limited to no experience with actual war. For them, the movement appeals to a sense of social justice; it offers one among many new outlets to express disenchantment with the regime's repressive apparatus.

When asked about the Houthi's goals in the revolution, Shabab al-Sumud youth leader Ali al-Imad emphasized that the group is inherently religious, *not political*, with Zaidi revivalist roots. Indeed, the Houthi movement stems partly from a reaction to increasing Salafi presence in historically Zaidi-controlled Saada in the 1980s. At the same time, Imad pointed to the importance of the group's political front. Houthis believe that "Islam and politics are fundamentally compatible," and hope to get involved officially in Yemeni political life, that is, if they feel that political progress reflects the spirit of the revolution as "democratic and free." In this vein, they were among the first to boycott the Saudi-penned, United States-backed Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) agreement for Yemen because as Imad put it: "We are anti-oppression, for freedom of expression, and against American invasions and foreign influence. The GCC agreement is none of these."

Beyond the southern movement, the Houthis in Change Square have formed a number of coalitions with parties of diverse political bends. In early January they joined in a coalition with the Baath party and the Union of Popular Forces (a Zaidi party) against al Islah Islamist party; they have had links with the Socialists (*Hizb al-Ishtiraki*) for the past several years; and they also allegedly held talks with the Joint Meeting Parties in January. A fuss was recently made about al-Houthi's letter of support for the newly formed Zaidi 'Ulema-led party, al-Ummah. But al-Houthi and Imad have made it quite clear that this party does not represent them either. All of these alliances are tactical, suggested Imad, and when the Houthis are ready to participate in politics, they will create their *own* party.

Much of this information tracks with press office releases and speeches by Al-Houthi. Al-Houthi met with officials from the European Community this month and promised U.N. envoy Jamal Bin Omar in December that his supporters would indeed form a political party and participate in the forthcoming national reconciliation dialogue. During a packed February 3 celebration of the prophet's birthday (*Mawlid al-Nabuwi)* — a holiday repressed by Saleh during his war on the North — al-Houthi called for the creation of a civil state in Yemen. Al-Houthi's media outfit, Ansar Allah (Supporters of Allah), also released several key conciliatory statements, on their willingness to accept Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar's apology for the Saada wars and suggesting that despite Houthi opposition to the election, polling centers in Sadaa were operational and the rights of voters would be protected.

On the other hand, there remain troubling indicators in and around Saada suggesting the Houthis are neither so moderate nor so democratically inclined. Despite some rhetorical support for the country's political transformation, their rather vehement boycotting of the GCC process — including the February 21 referendum — their increasingly hard-handed style of rule in the north, and smoldering sectarian violence sets them apart from other opposition groups.

First, Houthi reticence until now to meaningfully engage in political life through the elections and forming a party suggests they remain uncertain about their political motives. The Houthis and other independents are right in emphasizing that uncompetitive, one-candidate presidential elections were merely procedural. What *will* be significant is a change in institutions, including military restructuring, judicial and constitutional reforms that give the state autonomy from previous factions within it. Yet, despite al-Houthi's statement that the group would not prevent the voting process, reporting suggests only one polling station was open in Saada on February 21, and voters in the area were allowed to forgo dipping their fingers in ink for fear of Houthi retribution. A massive march held in Saada city to boycott the elections, and reports of Houthis storming Islah party headquarters to tear up Hadi campaign posters and replace them with posters about boycotting the election, is evidence of voter intimidation and the silencing of non-Houthi supporters.

Further, Houthi supporters have yet to form a political party and step beyond the merely tactical alliances in Change Square. Indeed, given the patterns of patrimonialism in Yemeni politics, links to the central government are perhaps the only way to bring the requisite reconstruction money to the devastated northwest. As a contact in Sanaa whose brother fought with the Houthis asked, "What do they want out of the revolution, if not political parties?"

Second, while the relative security, electricity, and increased social services are a step up from a near decade of battles with the government, anecdotes suggest that Saada today is being run with an iron fist. For example, the strategic city of Dahyan, commonly referred to as the "Zaidi Najaf" for its historical religious importance, has a 6 p.m. curfew for women, and non-Zaidis are not allowed to live in the city. An interviewee whose family is from Dahyan noted that the Houthi "Death to America, Death to Israel" slogan is sung at every prayer by men who pump their right fists in the air like Hezbollah. Anti-American rhetoric remains pervasive in Houthi statements. In February, the Houthis started an online campaign to expel the U.S. ambassador from Yemen, and further internationalized their propaganda by supporting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and publically condemning the burning of Qurans by U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan. While the northwest has always been extremely conservative and wary of outside interference, it is unclear how such Zaidi fundamentalism and xenophobic rhetoric can be conducive to integration into a larger Yemeni democratic process.

Finally, while al-Houthi consistently argues that the group has no political goals and is only temporarily controlling the northwestern provinces until a more appropriate figure can assume control — U.S. Ambassador to Yemen Gerald Feierstein expressed concern "about conflicts between Houthis and others in the north and a fairly aggressive effort on their part to expand their territory and their control." Fear of Houthi encroachment upon pockets where residents do not support them has recently led to spats between Salafi Sunnis at the Damaj madrasa in Saada, with hundreds dead from both sides since the fall of 2011. Sectarian fighting between pro and anti-Houthi tribes in January spread to the province of Hajja and displaced an estimated 2,000 people, adding to the nearly 200,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) there from previous rounds of fighting. The sectarian nature of these conflicts threatens to evolve into a proxy war in a way that the previous battles between the Houthis and the government of Yemen did not. The immense scale of online propaganda about the conflict suggests increased Saudi interest and thus Sunni internationalization of what used to be a highly localized conflict. On the Shiite side, reports about an intercepted Iranian ship carrying mortars and weapons for Houthi re-supply have lead to new speculation about Iranian exploitation of the conflict. The ratcheting up of rhetoric about Iranian links to the Houthis — essentially depicting them as foreign — without hard evidence is an impediment to Houthi political integration and that should be avoided.

Ultimately, despite so much speculation about what the Houthis want, it is not clear they actually know. Those sympathetic to the Houthis have argued that the revolution has changed them — it has encouraged the once defensive movement to put down its arms,

begin to articulate its goals, and come to terms with a political process — however slowly it is progressing. This may have serious benefits for them in the future, including autonomy, lasting security, and much-needed reconstruction. According to their detractors, however, we should look to fighting on the ground in Saada and Hajjah, as well as Houthi reticence to take part in the mainstream operations of the changing political scene, as evidence of the group's nefarious modus operandi. Perhaps neither extreme is the case. In the wake of humanitarian crisis, sectarian tension, and persistent paranoia about Saudi and U.S. intervention, Sadans are more likely simply trying to rebuild their communities, and redefine themselves and their place in the Yemeni state, and vis-à-vis the international community. This contrast between the context of the center and the periphery may explain some of the disconnect between Houthi rhetoric and Houthi action. Indeed, while the youth movement preaches unity, democracy, and peace, Abdalmalik al-Houthi has thus far proven non-committal to the institutional paths needed to achieve these things.

Madeleine Wells is a PhD student at George Washington University.

Tawakkol's Revolutionary Pluralism

By Stacey Philbrick Yadav, December 16, 2011

Watching Tawakkol Karman jump to her feet and clap along throughout Jill Scott's anthem, "Hate on Me," at the Nobel Peace Concert on Sunday, December 11, 2011, was a moment I will most certainly never forget. As a visibly emotional Scott sang with defiance, "You cannot hate on me, 'cause my mind is free. Feel my destiny, so shall it be..." the room was electric, each of us watching to see the faces and reactions of the extraordinary women for whom we were told this song was specifically requested.

But aside from the unifying fact that the three recipients of this year's Nobel Peace Prize — Tawakkol Karman, Leymah Gbowee, and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf — have each persisted in the face of personal and political adversity, it has sometimes been hard to determine the common thread connecting their work. Throughout a range of festivities during the weekend, I was frequently asked how Karman, in particular, fit in.

The 2011 co-recipients were commended "for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work." And yet, as I argued in October 2011 and as Karman made perfectly clear in her own remarks on December 10, her project in Yemen is not really "about" women's rights, per se. It rests instead on a conception of non-violent revolution that views society as a holistic unit composed of differently-situated citizens, defined by gender, region, class, tribal affiliation, ideology, and more, endowed with the right to make claims against their government. And as she led 6,000 people in the Oslo Spektrum through a call-and-response chant straight from Change Square, we raised our arms aloft for peaceful revolution, democracy, rule of law, and comprehensive development — rights to which Karman believes all women, but also all men, are entitled.

But understanding why and how Karman's project speaks implicitly to women's rights is important in this transformational moment in the Middle East, a moment in which authoritarian regimes are being challenged, and Islamists appear to be ascendant. We should remember that Karman has been roundly criticized in Yemen for her approach — by hardliners in the Islamist party from which she has risen, who have found her visibility as a woman unseemly or inappropriate, and by secular women's rights advocates who are nervous about the Islamist tone of her approach. Karman's holistic language is indeed consistent with longstanding arguments put forth by Islamist modernists across the region, who argue that society is ordered by relationships of interdependence and mutual respect but not necessarily full legal equality. But in words and in deeds, she also departs in an essential and revolutionary way from

Islamist affirmations of tolerance, emphasizing pluralism instead. The message of tolerance is that some actor or class of actors has the power to permit (and, implicitly, the power to deny) others to share social or political space. This is not an articulation of the other's *right* to difference. One of Karman's key themes, by contrast, is the necessity of affirming one another's right to be different - and diversely so.

This concept of "diverse difference" is one that has been central to the work of another Nobel laureate, Amartya Sen, who has argued against solitarist ways in which we regard each other through one and only one lens. Instead, Sen argues for institutions that allow each person to define for herself the many ways in which she may be different from (or similar to) others and thus to deliberate publicly and make meaningful choices between competing forms of political solidarity. It is with this in mind that he offered in his 2010 work, *The Idea of Justice,* a forceful philosophical argument for his longstanding contention that democracy is both a means and an end of development.

These two ideas — that individuals are diversely different, and that democracy is both a means and an end — are central to Tawakkol Karman's worldview and work, but also to Islamist political commitments that have been expanding in the Middle East in 2011 (and, indeed, over several years, if cross-ideological opposition alliances across the region are any indication). Without question, Karman does not represent *all* or even most Islamist thinking — but her star is rising, as is her message.

So is Karman — an Islamist, a woman, a journalist, an activist, a revolutionary — working for women's rights? She is unquestionably working for the rights of women to self-definition and political agency. She inhabits many (sometimes compatible and sometimes contradictory) social roles, and assumes that each of her fellow Yemenis — and each of us, more broadly — is as diversely different as she is. This fact of diverse difference is thus ironically unifying, and it is only through democratic institutions that the multitude possibilities of our coming together can genuinely emerge.

Karman is articulating this revolutionary pluralism against a legacy of "state feminism" in Yemen (and throughout the region), where women have largely been positioned as objects of state discourse and policy, with nominal opportunities to shape policy outcomes. This has been true even with regard to the most gender-progressive policies, like those in Tunisia, where women's gains as women have been guaranteed by fiat, not through deliberation or choice. Her revolutionary pluralism promises to expand opportunities for women to define themselves, to become agentive subjects empowered to join with others (women and men) along axes of politics that matter most to them. Karman's project offers this even as she avoids singling out gender as a category of singular significance.

And democracy is essential to peace, insofar as it allows for the meaningful expression of diverse difference that is so important to coexistence. Pluralism, and the institutions which are required to protect and nurture it, allow women (and men) the right to multiply, not reduce, the complex ways in which they see themselves and others. During the weekend of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony, a woman who has in the span of two short months become one of the region's most visible leaders affirmed that each person must have the unassailable "right to be different." It is hard to imagine how a political order built on this vision would be anything short of revolutionary.

Stacey Philbrick Yadav is an assistant professor of political science at Hobart and William Smith Colleges and was a contributor to the SHEROES exhibition at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo, Norway.

Chapter 6

LIBYA

Getting Libya's Rebels Wrong

By Najla Abdurrahman, March 31, 2011

The remarks by Admiral James Stavridis, NATO's supreme allied commander for Europe, alleging "flickers in the intelligence of potential al Qaeda, Hezbollah" among Libyan rebels are indicative of a disturbing trend in much of the discussion — and reporting — on Libya in March, 2011. Ambiguous statements linking Libya and al Qaeda were repeatedly made in the media without clarifying or providing appropriate context to such remarks. In many instances, these claims were distorted or exaggerated; at times they were simply false.

The admiral's comments — and the subsequent headlines they engendered — represent a new level of irresponsibility, constructing false connections, through use of highly obscure and equivocal language, between al Qaeda and Libyan pro-democracy forces backed by the Transitional National Council. The latter is itself led by a group of well-known and respected Libyan professionals and technocrats. Even more far-fetched is the admiral's mention of a Hezbollah connection, or "flicker" as he put it.

Statements of this type are troubling because of their tendency to create alarmist ripple effects. Such perceptions, once created, are nearly impossible to reverse and may do serious damage to the pro-democracy cause in Libya. That Stavridis qualified his comments by stating that the opposition's leadership appeared to be "responsible men and women" will almost certainly be overshadowed by the mention of al Qaeda in the same breath. One must wonder, then, what precisely was the purpose of the admiral's vague and perplexing remarks.

There is a pressing need for officials and commentators to clarify connections drawn between Libya and al Qaeda and to provide more accurate and responsible analysis. And it's not just Stavridis's reference to al Qaeda that is problematic; two similar claims making the media rounds also demand careful scrutiny. One involves an anti-Qaddafi organization called the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) that confronted and was crushed by the regime in the 1990s. The second involves disturbing reports of the recruitment of Libyan youth by al Qaeda in Iraq, some who left their homes to take part in suicide missions in that country. Neither is connected to the current uprising, but both are frequently mentioned when discussing it.

Let's start with the LIFG, whose activities were recounted to me by a former member of the group's leadership council now residing in London, Noman Benotman, in a lengthy interview I conducted with him in December 2009.

The exact date of the LIFG's formation is unclear, but its roots can be traced back to the 1980s. In preparation for launching attacks against the Qaddafi regime, many members of the still nascent group traveled to Afghanistan to join the U.S.-backed mujahideen in their struggle against the Soviets and to undergo military training before returning to Libya.

In the early 1990s, LIFG members, among them Benotman, Saad Furjani, and others, developed extensive plans to expand the organization and prepare it for armed struggle; these were to be executed in several phases until the group was in a position to confront the regime directly. However, in 1995, the group's activities were prematurely exposed when LIFG members led by Furjani and disguised as state security services stormed a Benghazi hospital and rescued Khaled Baksheesh, a fellow member who had been arrested and was in critical condition after being beaten by police who had discovered a concealed weapon in his possession. In response, state security services began a sweep of the region, and several LIFG cells were eventually discovered in cities throughout the country, including Benghazi, Tripoli, Darnah, Zawiyah, and Sabha. The group's leadership council, most of whose members were in Sudan at the time, elected to declare its presence as an organization in October of that year, making public its intention to topple the regime. Over the next few years, Libyan security forces crushed the would-be rebellion, arresting or killing most of the LIFG's membership.

Given that the Qaddafi regime was attempting to contain a homegrown opposition that threatened its continued survival, its decision to repair its damaged relations with the West beginning in the late 1990s was in essence a pragmatic one. This rapprochement necessitated, among other things, cooperation with Western anti-terrorism efforts: The LIFG was soon declared a terrorist organization by the U.S. government.

In 2005, Saif al-Islam al-Qaddafi, leader Muammar's son, proposed a dialogue between the regime and the imprisoned LIFG membership, which numbered in the hundreds. He approached Benotman, who had been out of the country when the LIFG was discovered and had since settled in London; Benotman agreed to act as a liaison between the government and the prisoners beginning in January 2007.

The result of this dialogue was the release in September 2009 of a 400-page document titled *Corrective Studies in Understanding Jihad, Accountability and the Judgment of People*. The study — authored by imprisoned senior LIFG members and intellectuals

Abd al-Hakim Balhaj, Abu al-Mundhir al-Saidi, Abd al-Wahab al-Qayed, Khalid al-Sharif, Miftah al-Duwdi, and Mustafa Qanaifid — analyzes various concepts related to jihad and Islamic law in an effort to delegitimize the use of armed struggle to overthrow the regimes of Muslim states. The LIFG recantation made headlines throughout the Arab world, and several prominent Muslim clerics, including Yusuf al-Qaradawi, praised the study. Even the Western media took notice. Others doubted the sincerity of the recantation, arguing that it was coerced or done simply to secure prisoner releases.

As the West's darling in Libya — a country that over the last decade had actively sought to burnish its image on the international stage — Saif al-Islam was able to manipulate the story of the LIFG in order to make the claim that the Qaddafi regime had succeeded not only in thwarting al Qaeda in Libya, but in rehabilitating it to boot. In reality, this was little more than a public relations stunt designed to bolster Qaddafi's image as an effective hedge against terrorism, an ironic proposition given his past involvement in terrorist activities.

Although the LIFG had advocated the use of force against the regime, its former leaders have been quick to distinguish their group from radical organizations like al Qaeda, despite having trained in some of the same camps in Afghanistan and Sudan in the 1980s and 1990s. They point out that the LIFG never advocated the use of violence against Libyan or non-Libyan civilians, never participated in al Qaeda attacks, and had no interest in waging war on either Libyan society or the West — its target had been Qaddafi and Qaddafi alone. The LIFG never joined al Qaeda; in fact, LIFG leaders like Benotman have publicly denounced the organization's use of indiscriminate violence and have in the past actively sought to distance themselves from the group, objecting vehemently to statements by al Qaeda's No. 2, Ayman al-Zawahiri, that the two groups had merged.

Despite the LIFG's repudiation of al Qaeda, the latter did manage to infiltrate Libyan society in other, limited ways. In 2008, *Newsweek* reported the discovery of documents in northern Iraq suggesting that out of 606 al Qaeda militants listed, 112 had come from Libya. More striking was that nearly half of these were from Darnah, a city of 50,000 known even among Libya's neglected eastern regions for having suffered considerably under Qaddafi's tenure. Even more troubling was that many of these young men appeared to have volunteered for suicide missions.

It seems that though Qaddafi was successful in crushing his own internal opposition, he made little effort to stanch the trickle of would-be militants out of the country. Not only did the regime fail to prevent al Qaeda recruiters from preying on disillusioned young men, but it also arguably contributed to the problem by fueling the discontent and hopelessness endemic to Libyan society, where unemployment hovers around 30 percent and a deceptively high gross domestic product (GDP) belies the reality that most of the country's oil wealth has not trickled down to the average citizen.

Why would young Libyans decide to abandon their homes and their families to kill and be killed in a foreign country? The reasons are complex, varied, and tragic, but there is little doubt that a deep sense of despair stemming from a lifetime of repression and lack of economic opportunity played a significant role. Although 112 individuals in a country of 6.5 million represents a negligible proportion of the population, the recruitment of young men by al Qaeda is nevertheless a source of grave concern among Libyans, just as it is for Europe, the United States, and other countries that have grappled with similar problems.

Although Libya is in some ways a traditional society, al Qaeda remains deeply unpopular among its people, many of whom have been keen to stress that this uprising is in no way connected to the terrorist organization. Indeed, they have repeatedly scoffed at Qaddafi's absurd accusations to the contrary. The Libyan revolution is a decidedly nationalist, democratic movement, two characteristics that render it fatally incompatible with al Qaeda's delusional goal of resurrecting a pan-Islamic caliphate; the Libyan people have no intention of allowing their movement to be hijacked by al Qaeda. That a handful of rebel fighters may have a history with the LIFG does not mean that the Transitional National Council or the pro-democracy fighters are connected to al Qaeda, yet this is precisely what the Qaddafi regime would have the international community believe. Indeed, the council released a statement refuting allegations aimed at associating al Qaeda with the revolutionists in Libya, and affirming its commitment to combating terrorism and implementing Security Council resolutions on counterterrorism.

After his remark about "flickers" of al Qaeda, Stavridis admitted that he lacked "the detail sufficient to say that there's a significant al Qaeda presence or any other terrorist presence in and among these folks." But the absence of evidence cannot be passed off as the presence of information. Ambiguous and misleading statements like the admiral's do a grave disservice to the Libyan people and their cause by effectively and unfairly lumping them together with al Qaeda in the public consciousness; they also do a disservice to those who seek a better understanding of Libya and its people. Libyans have already had to contend with the Qaddafi regime's ridiculous allegations that their movement is nothing more than an al Qaeda plot fueled by widespread hallucinogenic drug use — let's not join him in denigrating their cause.

Najla Abdurrahman, a Libyan-American writer and activist, is a doctoral student in Columbia University's Department of Middle Eastern, South, Asian, and African Studies. She lives in New York City.

Ex-Jihadists in the New Libya

By Omar Ashour, August 29, 2011

Abd al-Hakim Belhaj, the commander of Tripoli's Military Council who spearheaded the attack on Muammar al-Qaddafi's compound at Bab al-Aziziya, is raising red flags in the West. Belhaj, whom I met and interviewed in March 2010 in Tripoli along with Saif al-Islam al-Qaddafi, is better known in the jihadi world as "Abu Abdullah al-Sadiq." He is the former commander of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), a jihad organization with historical links to al Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Egyptian al-Jihad organization. Does his prominent role mean that jihadists are set to exploit the fall of Qaddafi's regime?

Established in 1990 and officially dismantled in 2010, the LIFG was modeled along the lines of the Egyptian al-Jihad: secretive, elitist, and exclusively paramilitary. The group led a three-year, low-level insurgency mainly based in eastern Libya and tried three times to assassinate Qaddafi in 1995 and 1996. By 1998, the LIFG was crushed in Libya. Most of its leaders and members fled and joined forces with the Taliban in Afghanistan. They even gave a religious oath of loyalty (*bay'a*) to Mullah Omar. After 9/11 and the invasion of Afghanistan, Belhaj and most of the LIFG leaders fled that country as well, only to be arrested in 2004 by the C.I.A and then handed over to Qaddafi's regime, following interrogations in Thailand and Hong Kong.

In 2010, Saif al-Islam was trying to apply the Egyptian model of "deradicalization" on the LIFG and then sell it to the West. Like the Egyptian Islamic group, six of the LIFG leaders authored a 416-page document delegitimating armed opposition to Qaddafi's regime and other rulers by theological and ideological argumentations, regardless of their standards of oppression. The book, which was titled, *Corrective Studies in Understanding Jihad, Enforcement of Morality, and Judgment of People*, was paraded, along with its authors, by Saif al-Islam in front of Western diplomats and experts. Al-Tuhami Khaled, who was at the time the head of Libya's Internal Security, publicly described the whole process as "heretics repenting."

I met with Belhaj in one of these so-called "reconciliation" conferences. When I asked him about the status of the LIFG, he replied that it had been dismantled. When I asked about the future, he was not sure. He had been released less than two hours before from the notorious Abu Salim prison, where many of his followers chanted earlier to journalists' cameras, "Teach us our leader; teach us how to build our futures." And by "our leader" they meant Qaddafi, not Belhaj.

"The tyrant fled, and we will be after him," said a victorious Belhaj to the media following the storming of Bab al-Aziziya. But neither arrogance nor vengeance dominated his tone. He repeatedly called for enhancing security, protecting property, ending vendettas, and building a new Libya. The moderate tone was generally consistent with what most of the LIFG leaders have stated in the last six months, whether in eastern or western Libya. The experiences of the LIFG leaders in armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Libya, and Algeria have forced them to mature politically, recalculate strategically, moderate behaviorally, modify their ideological beliefs, and change the title of the organization to the "Islamic Movement for Change."

However, enforcing the moderate behavior and rhetoric of the less-experienced followers in the newly open Libyan environment will be a challenge for the leadership. In 2010, both Belhaj and Sami al-Saadi, the principal ideologue of the LIFG, complained to me about younger members and other jihadists challenging their authority. This occurred within repressive prison conditions that were supported by the pressures and the inducements of Qaddafi's Internal Security. In the current and drastically different lawless war zone that has placed small and midsize arms in the hands of virtually everyone, the conditions change significantly, and so do the loyalties and the hierarchies.

The other challenge for the LIFG is transforming from a militia to a political party. A former member of the group relayed his concerns stating, "They don't have the experience. They were trained as fighters and theologians, not politicians. So when it comes to democracy, constitution, and elections, they've got nothing to say."

In the aftermath of Qaddafi, interactions between the National Transitional Council (NTC) and armed Islamist organizations can take three trajectories: reintegration, inclusion, or clash. The experience of South Africa and reintegration of the African National Congress (ANC) fighters comes to mind as a relatively successful case, providing some useful lessons. Reintegration in the military and security apparatuses will depend on their actual size and contributions, and of course, on the political will and calculations of the NTC. This path would not only be problematic for the NTC's Western partners, but also for the security and intelligence personnel, who will have to deal with the former "terrorists" as colleagues.

The second trajectory is political inclusion. This will also face some hurdles. Among those is the willingness of the mid-rank and the grassroots to participate in a democratic political process after being indoctrinated for decades with the idea that democracy is inherently anti-Islamic. But signs of successful jihadist transformation come from neighboring Egypt. The Islamic Group, a much larger armed Islamist organization whose leaders authored a big section of the anti-democratic literature, successfully dismantled its armed wing and finally formed a politically party (the Construction and Development). This can be a model to follow for Libyan armed Islamist militias, if their leadership so chooses.

The third scenario is probably the worst for Libya — the clash. A civil war, even a mini one, to oust Islamists would be as disastrous for Libyans and their neighbors as was the Algerian civil war in the 1990s. Unfortunately this scenario is not unlikely. A detailed study on resistance to authoritarianism by Columbia University has shown that the probability of a country relapsing into civil war following a successful anti-dictatorship armed campaign is 43 percent. The study arrives at this figure after surveying 323 cases of armed and unarmed opposition campaigns between 1900 and 2006. Most of the lucky countries that escaped that civil war fate went through a successful disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process and, in parallel, a serious attempt at democratization. Both processes will be critical in determining the future of Libya and its Islamists in the aftermath of Qaddafi.

The NTC with the support of NATO has a good chance of avoiding an Iraq-like or an Algeria-like scenario in Libya. The pillars of their policies toward the multiple armed Islamist groups following the end of the conflict should be rapid disarmament and political inclusiveness. The disarmament process should be rewarding, and a wide variety of benefits and selective inducements could be proffered in return. In the event that mediation is necessary, interactions between credible scholars and independent sheiks, and the heads of the armed groups should be facilitated by the NTC to provide legitimacy for its policies. In all cases, the NTC is likely to meet resistance, and its objectives should then be focused on minimizing and delegitimizing that resistance.

Omar Ashour is the director of the Middle East Graduate Studies Program at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, and a visiting fellow in the Brookings Doha Center. He can be reached at o.ashour@exeter.ac.uk.

Libya's Muslim Brotherhood faces the future

By Omar Ashour, March 9, 2012

"The Muslim Brothers established this party. We are a national civil party with an Islamic reference...we have Islamists and nationalists," said Al-Amin Belhajj, the head of the founding committee for the newly announced Justice and Construction Party. With the March 3 announcement, Libya seems set to follow the electoral path of Islamist success seen in Egypt, Tunisia, and other Arab countries. After decades of fierce repression of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) by the regime of Muammar al-Qaddafi, the formation of a political party in Libya is a heady experience. What does it mean for Libya's future?

The Muslim Brotherhood's presence in Libya goes back to 1949. But their first clear organizational structure was developed in 1968 and quickly froze in 1969 after the coup of Colonel Qaddafi. The Brotherhood was never allowed to operate openly, and suffered extreme repression. Indeed, when State TV did broadcast something about them, it was the bodies of their leaders hung from street lampposts in the mid 1980s. Qaddafi's media called them "deviant heretics" and "stray dogs." Fleeing repression, the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood was reborn in the United States, where members established the "Islamic Group - Libya" in 1980 and issued their magazine *The Muslim*. In 1982, many of the MB figures who were studying in the United States returned to Libya to reestablish the organization in the country but ended up in prison or were executed.

The Libyan Muslim Brotherhood made a comeback in 1999, and entered into a novel dialogue with the regime. Its rebirth was bolstered in 2005 and 2006 by Saif al-Islam al-Qaddafi's initiatives, which aimed to coopt and neutralize opposition groups, particularly Islamist ones. This led to doubts about their motivations during the 2011 revolution, charges which Brotherhood leaders reject. "No, we did not plan the revolution and we weren't playing a double game with the regime," said Fawzi Abu Kitef, the head of the Revolutionary Brigades Coalition in Eastern Libya and the former deputy defense minister in the National Transitional Council (NTC). Abu Kitef was a leading figure in the Brotherhood who spent more than 18 years in Qaddafi's jails, including Abu Salim. Indeed, from the outset, the Brotherhood was supportive of the NTC, with some of its icons joining it, such as Dr. Abdullah Shamia, who was in charge of the economy file in the NTC.

The Libyan Muslim Brotherhood (MB) modeled its new party after Egypt's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). It is much smaller than its Egyptian counterpart, however. In 2009, Soliman Abd al-Qadr, the former General Observer of the Libyan MB, estimated the numbers of MB figures in exile to be around 200 and inside Libya to be a few thousand, mainly concentrated in the professional and student sectors. While those cadres will be critical for the movement and its party, they can hardly compare to the hundreds of thousands of the Egyptian Brotherhood.

During its first public conference in Benghazi in November 2011, the Libyan MB restructured the organization, elected a new leader, increased its consultative council membership from 11 to 30 leaders, and decided to form a political party. In their party elections, Mohammed Swan, the former head of the Libyan MB's Consultative Council, narrowly defeated the former MB leader Soliman Abd al-Qadr and two other candidates to become the leader of the new party, the Justice and Construction Party (JCP). "Participation in the party will be based on individual, not as group basis," said Bashir al-Kubty, the elected General Observer of the Libyan Muslim Brothers. He meant that the party would not be a political front, and in particular not an Islamist front (like the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front). "They want it to be like the FJP in Egypt, 80 percent MB and 20 percent others...to be able to say that they are inclusive," said Jum'a al-Gumati, a former representative of the NTC in London.

When Ali al-Sallabi, a leading Islamist activist once affiliated with the MB, proposed a National Rally Coalition to include the MB and other Islamists, the MB ultimately rejected the proposal. The objective of the MB at the moment is to have control over its political arm. It ostentatiously shuns alliances with ex-jihadists (like those of the Libyan Islamic Movement for Change — LIMC) to avoid any international outcry. It will also reject initiatives proposed by ex-affiliates, like Sallabi, as this will send a wrong message to the grassroots and the mid-ranks. Domestic and international legitimacy, expansion of audience, and control of members seem to be the determinants of the Libyan MB's behavior in the current transitional period.

The emerging Libyan political scene poses several major challenges to the MB. Unlike the MB in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia, the Islamists of Libya have little history of interactions with the masses. The MB of Egypt had a third life from the early 1970s, and during the last four decades it worked hard, under hazardous conditions, to build mass support in universities, professional syndicates, unions, and on the streets. Ennahda in Tunisia is not much different, although the mass-support building efforts were frozen in 1990. The Libyan MB did not have any similar chances to connect with the masses. They also did not have the opportunity to build their organizational structures or institutions within Libya, or create a parallel network of clinics and social services.

Second, Libyan Islamists will have to deal with persistent questions about their commitment to democratic values, women rights, and toleration of others. The attempt to be inclusive was clear at the party's conference on March 2 and 3. Walid al-Sakran, non-member of the MB, was a candidate for the party's leadership and five women attempted to join the 45-member Consultative Council. Three were successful. Even if the leadership is committed to pragmatism, the grassroots and sympathizers expect the ideology to influence the behavior. The challenge for the leadership is to legitimate its pragmatic behavior, including coalitions with non-Islamists, to their followers. The presence of many of these groups in exile in the West earlier, and the experience in ideological transitions may help ease the tension between political pragmatism and ideological commitments. This particularly applies to the MB and the LIMC, but not necessarily to the local Salafis (who are more numerous than the members of both organizations, but lack a structure and leadership).

Third, the constitution crafting process will pose thorny challenges. The reference to the *sharia* as the principle source of legislation in the constitutional declaration of August 2011 has raised a few eyebrows in the West and among Libya's liberals. A similar reaction happened when Mustafa Abd al-Jalil, the Chairman of the NTC, talked about the superiority of *sharia* and the legitimacy of polygamy in the liberation speech. The MB, the LIMC, and Salafi figures interviewed perceived this as a victory. "The laws of Libya have to have an Islamic reference and that should be enshrined in the constitution," asserted al-Kubty. "The issue of the *sharia* is settled. It will be the supreme source of legislation...there is no point in making this debatable or raising the Quran in Benghazi and Sabha," said Dr Abd al-Nasser Shamata, the head of the Crisis Management Unit in the NTC. His statement was a response to demonstrations of hundreds in Benghazi and Sabha demanding the implementation of the *sharia*.

If the Islamists win the elections of the National Assembly that will be held in July, as many analysts expect, the constitution is more likely to be upheld with some provisions asserting religious identity of the state. This will continue a process of political and ideological polarization that is already severely dividing the new Libya.

Omar Ashour is a visiting fellow in the Brookings Doha Center and the director of the Middle East Graduate Studies Program in the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter (UK). He can be reached at o.ashour@exeter.ac.uk

Libya's Constitutional Balancing Act

By Sean Kane, December 14, 2011

The day-to-day priority in Libya has rightly been placed upon determining the future of the young, mostly civilian revolutionary fighters who rose up to overthrow the Qaddafi regime. But what is imperative in the long term is the political contest to define the structure and power relationships of the new state through the writing of Libya's permanent constitution that will take place in 2012. In November 2011, the interim government established an electoral committee charged with setting the formula to elect the drafters of Libya's new national charter. It now bears the heavy responsibility of specifying how votes and participation in Libya's first genuine elections in over a half-century will be translated into seats and representation in its constitutional assembly.

This is a potentially pivotal question for Libya's political transition. Events in neighboring Egypt have already shown that a breakdown in the perceived legitimacy of the supervision over the transition to a new constitutional order can bring revolutionaries back out into the street *en masse*. Likewise, Libya's own historical experience suggests that the manner in which a constitutional assembly is chosen can sow the seeds for future contention if the process is seen to predetermine answers to some of the country's most sensitive debates.

From the very beginning Libya's 17th of February Revolution was more fraught and violent than those next door in Egypt and Tunisia. Muammar al-Qaddafi's idiosyncratic rule subverted Libyan institutions to such an extent that all distinction was eroded between the state and the regime. Unlike in Egypt or Tunisia, the Libyan army did not have a separate corporate standing that it could hope to salvage by siding with the protesters. Rather, the Qaddafi regime's overthrow was only accomplished through its military defeat by a collection of municipally and even neighborhood-level organized militias (supported by a NATO air campaign and a big financial boost from Qatar and the Gulf).

The remarkable bottom-up nature of the revolution has had obvious consequences for Libya's current situation, as illustrated by the multitude of revolutionary brigades who openly jockeyed for influence in the forming of the interim government. More subtly though, it has also stirred historical regionalist tendencies in Libya. Strong local identities in cities like Benghazi, Misrata, Zintan and other major towns are now increasingly interwoven with a narrative of who suffered the most under Qaddafi, who sacrificed the most in fighting him, and, by extension, who is entitled to the fruits of the new order.

This is a sensitive debate in a country where local loyalties, pan-Arabism, and membership in the global Islamic community of the faithful have often counted for more than a sense of common Libyan national identity. Under the Ottoman rule, Libya consisted of the three *wilayets* (states) of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan, roughly corresponding to the country's current west, east, and south. Geographically separated by Libya's vast and foreboding desert expanses, the three regions developed distinct social and political structures.

Given this history, the National Transitional Council (NTC) that spearheaded the 17th of February Revolution strategically presented itself as a national movement. Headquartered in Benghazi, the capital of Libya's east, it repeatedly emphasized that victory would not be declared until the west was liberated, that Tripoli would remain the national capital, and that it would not be satisfied with a regional enclave (nor by implication that it was the successor to the autonomous emirate of Cyrenaica that popped up on multiple occasions in eastern Libya during resistance to Italian colonial occupation last century).

After the fall of Tripoli in late August 2011, liberation was declared in Benghazi on October 23 and the NTC formally began the process of relocating to Tripoli. The council's own westward move has been followed by much of the international community and media. As the oxygen of governance and global attention has shifted to Tripoli, old feelings in Libya's east of inequality and marginalization have resurfaced. Many emphasize that they fought the revolution not just to overthrow Qaddafi, but also to replace the mindset of dictatorial centralization they see as the linchpin of his 42-year reign. Street protests in Benghazi in early December 2011 complaining that the city is being forgotten, and the swift response of the NTC to name Benghazi as Libya's economic capital, demonstrate how much of a livewire issue this is.

Which brings us back to the election of the 200-person National Public Conference that will draft the constitution. With an estimated two-thirds of Libya's six million people living in western Libya, the east and south argue that an electoral formula exacted purely on population-based proportional representation could result in a conference capable of writing and passing a constitution without their consent. At least in the east, there is real concern that this could result in a centralized system of government. As a result, nascent political movements in the east and south of Libya have begun calling for a geographically defined system of electoral districts, where each district would have the same number of representatives in the constitutional conference regardless of population size.

Tripoli and the west understandably have a different point of view. They have also seen how this played out before, and it did not end well. In 1951, the provisional national assembly that drafted Libya's independence constitution may have been appointed rather than elected, but it faced the same dilemma. Then, as now, Tripolitania in the west possessed approximately two-thirds of the population and favored a more centralized state. Its representatives unsuccessfully argued that the 60-member transitional assembly should mirror the country's population distribution.

Instead the regions of Cyrenaica in the east and Fezzan in the south managed to persuade the U.N. Commissioner overseeing preparations for Libya's independence that each of the three regions should have 20 representatives in the assembly despite major differences in their population sizes. This choice of representation formula proved far-reaching. Cyrenaica and Fezzan were both advocates for federalism and as a result of the decision had a clear majority in the provisional assembly. In essence, before pen was put to paper on the 1951 Constitution, it was already effectively determined that the newly independent Libyan state would be a federal monarchy.

The representation decision was also not without controversy or long-term consequence. Pro-centralization political parties from the west repeatedly attempted to reopen the representation debate during the preparation of the constitution and protested in Tripoli after Libya's first parliamentary elections in 1952. The new pro-federal Sannusi monarchy seated in Benghazi responded to the demonstrations by banning political parties, a prohibition which Qaddafi and the young officers maintained after their 1969 military coup. Some six decades later, the 1952 polls remain Libya's only multi-party elections.

Moreover, historians now argue that the loose federal structure hampered Libya's efforts to consolidate the formal institutions of a nation-state. Indeed, substantial revision to the constitution was soon required after its regionally oriented taxation scheme proved unable to cope with the massive inflow of oil revenue that began in the early 1960s. And for that matter, oil remains the elephant in the room in Libya's still not quite out in the open regionalism debate. It is also easy to see why given that the sector generates over 60 percent of Libya's gross domestic product (GDP) and 90 percent of government revenue. Moreover, the petro-fueled public sector dominates the Libyan economy and is by far the country's largest employer. With the majority of Libya's proven oil reserves and its largest export and refining facilities found in the east, there is fear elsewhere in the country that a decentralization of oil revenue could hollow out the national government.

This cautionary historical tale and display of the complexity of the choices Libya now faces suggests that it will be important for the NTC's newly appointed electoral committee to devise an electoral representation formula which does not sideline either Libya's populous and urban west, its oil rich and traditionally autonomy-minded east, nor its oft overlooked south. Fortunately, the constitutional declaration that guides Libya's transition primarily concerns itself with timelines for completing the permanent charter. It does not prescribe detailed rules for how the constitution should be adopted, leaving room for creative solutions that could promote balanced representation.

The most direct option would be to tackle the representation conundrum head-on using a sliding scale. Under this approach all constituencies would receive a baseline number of representatives in the constitutional conference regardless of their population size, with constituencies above a certain population threshold receiving additional seats. The aim would be to produce a formula somewhere in between pure population based representation and equal geographic representation.

Alternatively, there could be an upfront political agreement aimed at ensuring broad consensus on the constitutional text. For example, a super-majority of two-thirds could be required to pass the draft constitution through the National Public Conference. A similar option would be to focus on the stage of the constitutional referendum. In this scenario the constitution would not only have to receive a two-thirds majority nationwide as currently specified by the constitutional declaration, but also be endorsed by voters in a minimum number of provinces.

In future elections, Libyans could consider an electoral system for their parliament that rewards political movements and electoral alliances that win votes from across the country rather than those whose support is concentrated in one area or region.

In the end it is paramount to recall that these are sovereign Libyan decisions. The international community can only offer technical advice and options to accomplish the objectives that the Libyans themselves set. But respect for Libyan ownership of the transition does not preclude pointing out warning signs in the post-liberation dynamic.

In this vein, fears in parts of Libya that Qaddafi's marginalization of the periphery might reemerge is leading to vocal demands for decentralization to ensure justice and equality between Libya's regions. If the new constitutional assembly is not seen across Libya as representative, its ability to act as a forum to constructively hold the decentralization debate could be circumscribed. Likewise, currently limited support for fringe groups such as the proto-federalism movement in the east calling for turning the clock back to the monarchy era could grow.

After decades of living under an idiosyncratic regime that deliberately pursued a policy of divide and rule to maintain its grip on power, many ordinary Libyans rose up in February 2011 to fight for a free and united Libya. Ensuring balanced representation in the 2012 constitutional conference could prove an important step toward realizing this aspiration by forestalling any potential for a harmful regional divide to emerge in the new Libya.

Sean Kane is a Truman Security Fellow and the Deputy Team Leader for Libya at the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, an independent mediation organization supporting dialogue in Libya. This article represents his personal views.

The Libyan Rorschach

By Sean Kane, June 12, 2012

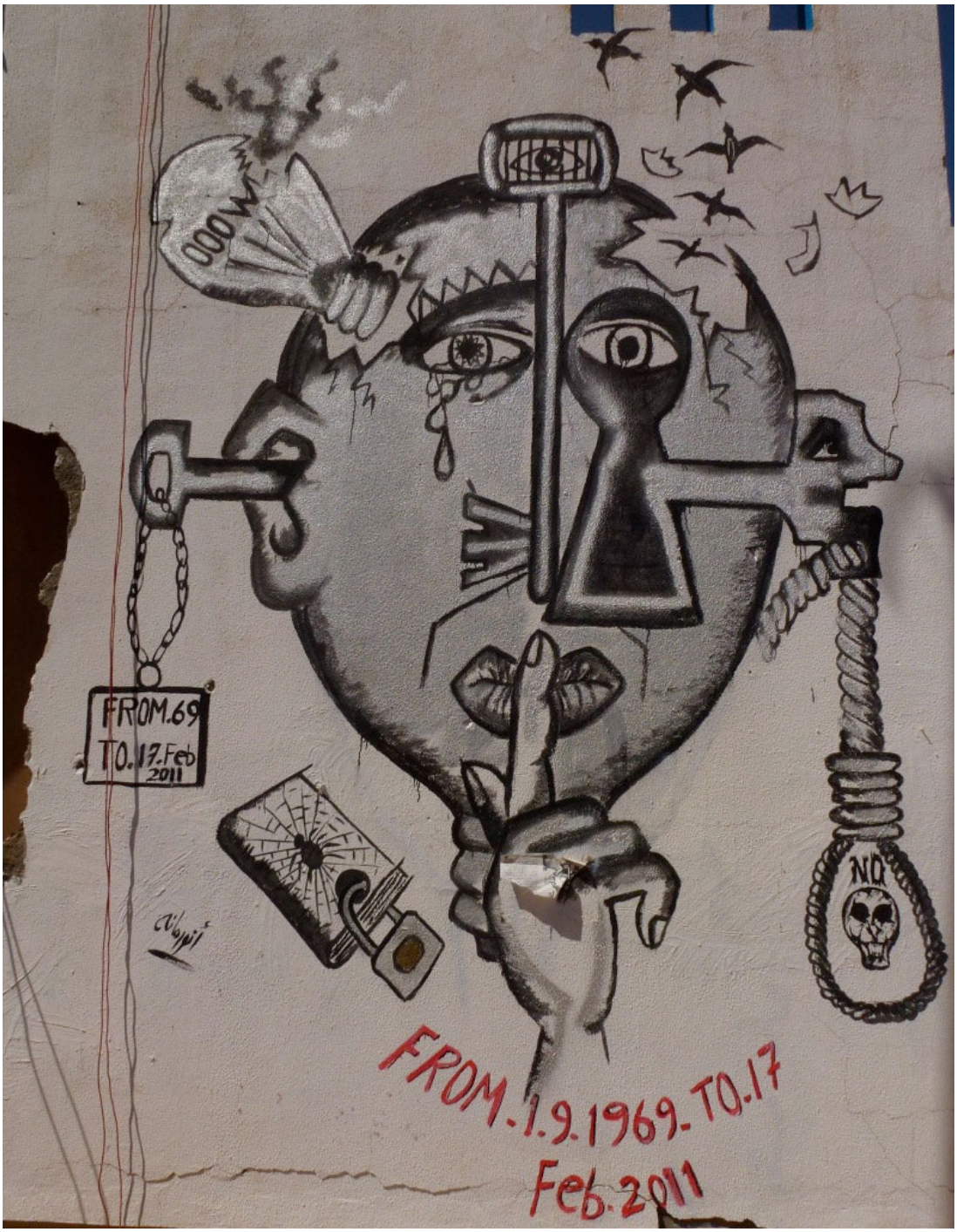
Using a bright blue pen, the young man behind the cash register in the kebab shop on the outskirts of Tripoli began to methodically scratch out the face of Muammar al-Qaddafi from his stack of one-dinar notes. About halfway through the pile, he greeted a bill that had already been defaced with a happy nod and smile of satisfaction. After exhausting the one-dinar notes he turned to the 20s, and began surgically excising a miniature Brother Leader from a summit group photo.

Prior to February 17, 2011 everything in Qaddafi's Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya was physically painted a shade of light green to symbolize the political system of stateless government laid out in the Brother Leader's Green Book. (The term jamahiriya was coined by Qaddafi and is usually loosely translated as "state of the masses" or "peopledom.") Today, the country is awash in the red, green and black tricolor scheme of the pre-Qaddafi era Libyan flag, which has been adopted by the revolutionaries as their standard. In Tripoli, where several neighborhoods had loyalist rather than revolutionary reputations, these coats of fresh paint and the common practice of doctoring car license plates to cover the word jamahiriya might raise an eyebrow. But what of the kebab seller's currency handiwork, which appeared to be a private act of conviction?

From the outside, the picture in Libya looks unremittingly bleak. A near daily chronicle of rampaging militias, conflict and chaos headlines coverage by the wire services. But perhaps a casualty of the closure of foreign bureaus and the lesser interest that exists when no U.S. boots are on the ground, some perspective is lacking from the often barebones news reports.

Eight months after the brutal death of Qaddafi marked the end of the civil conflict that followed Libya's popular uprising, support for the regime change appears to have if anything grown. Even if some of this backing falls into the "everyone loves a winner" category, a full 97 percent of Libyans surveyed by Oxford Research International in January thought the revolution was absolutely or somewhat right.

But is the mere fact of the revolution being broadly popular enough to make it right? Is it a sufficient platform to produce a secure and brighter future for Libya?



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In spite of this deep and abiding popularity of its popular uprising, Libya finds itself in the midst of a national quarrel over its revolutionary narrative and new founding myth.

In Benghazi, the city where the uprising against Qaddafi began, the eve of the one-year anniversary of the Libyan revolution is wet and windy. In the downtown of the former rebel capital and the country's second city, the large, almost all male crowd is celebrating enthusiastically by dancing to a catchy ballad entitled "O Benghazi." During breaks in the music they chant "Benghazi is the mother" and stomp "whether you like it or not, Benghazi was the spark" as if trying to win an argument. But whom are they trying to convince of Benghazi's status as the Libyan revolution's primus inter pares?

Benghazi claims precedence as the cradle of the revolution, and risked all by being the first to rise. Moving westward, the strategic port city of Misrata saw the most intense urban combat and damage. Its ability to hold out against a siege commanded by Qaddafi's seventh son Khamis perhaps kept the country from being partitioned into east and west. Meanwhile, the flyspeck town of Zintan along the border with Tunisia became the revolution's military hub in western Libya. It was from this dusty mountain redoubt that fighters swept into Tripoli in September 2011 to deliver a knockout blow to the regime.

These assertions of revolutionary credentials are about more than just honor and glory. It is also about who holds the greatest lien on its success. Convinced that not enough has changed in Libya since they launched the revolution, Benghazi has recently birthed a proto-federalism movement advocating for its own autonomous region. Misrata meanwhile holds the ministry of interior. It is sometimes characterized by its critics as a virtual city-state and its brigades police large swathes of the center of the country. Zintan's revolutionary prize was the ministry of defense. Its fighters are deployed around the country at key infrastructure sites such as oil fields in the south and even famously controlled Tripoli's lucrative international airport for several months.

During a visit to Libya's western mountains in early spring, a young Zintani activist put a pointed (if mistaken) question to me that seems to capture the new order's operating assumption: "Doesn't the American constitution give the states that supported your revolution more rights?"

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This lack of state institutions, and above all, a national identity, is perhaps the most lasting and pernicious legacy of the Qaddafi jamahiriya. In fact, Qaddafi's spasmodic state of perpetual change was a deliberate construction. His populace was kept perpetually off kilter by the near constant reshuffling of cabinets, provincial boundaries and systems of administration. Street names, place names, universities, and even the names of the months were always in flux, creating an almost physical feeling of disorientation. This pious Muslim country even started fasting for the holy month of Ramadan on a different day from the rest of the Middle East.

There was a method to this madness. Throughout all the chaos, the only fixed point for the Libyan people to take a bearing from was the unchanging axis of Qaddafi himself. And on a certain level this anti-system made sense. Qaddafi hailed from the remote desert town of Sirte in central Libya. He had no connection to the country's western economic elites in Tripoli or the prominent families in the east that made up the court of the Libyan monarchy that he overthrew. His own tribe, the Qadadfa, is small and holds little sway. Since Qaddafi had no natural allies among the Libya's elite networks, he set out to unmake and unmoor them.

A country simply cannot emerge from over four decades of scrambling in this Green blender without shellshock. Following the deliberate subversion of state institutions, Libyans retreated into identities and safety nets based on religion, kin, and geography. Confidence in government disappeared. Broader social trust bottomed out. Polls now remarkably find that fewer than one in five Libyans believe that other people can be trusted. Qaddafi bequeathed Libya, as one of the architects of landmark elections scheduled for later this month describes it, "a state of ashes."

This misshapen inheritance provides some perspective on Libya's current troubles. In keeping with the overall fragmentation of its society, neither the rivalries among the new powers that be nor the pockets of fighting that have sprung up around Libya are surprising. What is noteworthy that these disputes are locally driven rather than motivated by challenges to the new state or its territorial integrity. Because Qaddafi's erratic rule inspired feelings of shame and embarrassment rather than any sense of national belonging, the ideological basis for an armed counterrevolutionary movement is simply not present.

Libya's ongoing skirmishes are thus a distinct phenomenon from the poisonous nationwide insurgencies that engulfed Iraq and Afghanistan during the last decade. Instead of clearing areas of insurgents and building islands of stability, the new Libyan authorities face the less daunting task of quarantining largely unconnected outbreaks of violence. Even where formerly pro-regime towns or tribes have become part of the clashes, it has generally been with the aim of asserting a position in the new order rather than dreaming of overthrowing it.

Consider Sirte, Qaddafi's hometown and final refuge in last year's fighting. Situated in the middle of central Libya's vast desert basin, Sirte was historically the midway point of the thousand-mile plus journey between Tripoli and Benghazi. Over the past few decades it has benefited from lavish largesse and now incongruously boasts an international airport and a mammoth convention center that once played host to all of Africa and the Arab World's leaders. The town even has academic centers devoted to the study of Qaddafi's Green book. If one were looking for tendrils of opposition you would expect to find them here.

Sirtawis instead seem resigned to the reality that there is no going back to the way things were and generally want to be left alone. Their political grievances include resentment that Misrati transplants dominate Sirte's new local government and complaints that people from the town go missing at the checkpoints of Misrati fighters that now ring Sirte. But this appears to be as far as their political horizon extends. Sirtawis seem largely apathetic toward the country's new leaders and talk little of national politics. Instead they are pushing to have an elected local town council in order to lessen Misrati influence in the city. A local intellectual summed up their very everyday centered political vision to me as: Sirte "does not want to see Misrata to become the policeman of Libya."

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Sirte may be quiet, but it sometimes feels as if the rest of Libya is submerged in fights among rival tribes or between neighboring towns on opposing sides of the revolution. The critical larger picture though is that so far this violence remains intermittent and locally driven and contained. The fighting has a complex set of triggers, but is mainly stimulated by local grievances. Disputes over representation in local government, contested property claims, quarrels for control of smuggling revenue and even car jackings gone wrong speak to Libya's social unraveling under Qaddafi. They collectively contribute to a troubling sense of chaos in the country that will only be solved through painstaking institution building.

But they are still less menacing than an ideologically organized insurgency. What data exists backs this notion that Libya's violence is different from an armed insurrection bent on terrorizing the citizenry to depriving the governing authorities of legitimacy. While there is no comprehensive record, a rough guess based on news reports suggest that about 300 - 400 people have been killed in fighting since the death of Qadaffi last October. Most of the victims are part of Libya's legions of armed brigades rather than civilians. Mercifully the country has not been subject to car bombs or grisly suicide attacks. In contrast, at the nadir of Iraq's civil conflict, over 100 civilians were being killed by insurgents on a daily basis.

In Libya's urban centers of Tripoli and Benghazi, the skirmishes play out almost as a ritualized form of combat. The script typically involves young men firing bursts of increasingly heavier caliber weapons into the air and setting off homemade explosives usually used in dynamite fishing. Like Native Americans counting coup, the purpose seems to be winning prestige or claim to a street rather than hurting your opposite number, which would initiate a chain reaction of tribal and family revenge.

The most vivid example of this phenomenon that I witnessed was in Benghazi in late March. The central actor in the drama was a memorably named revolutionary militia called Purifying the Tyrant's Rats Brigade that attempted to "liberate" 300 cars from a farm outside of the city. Under post-revolutionary Libya's permissive understanding of freedom, a rumor that a prominent former Qaddafi official owned the farm made the brand new cars the property of the "Libyan people." The farm's actual owner, an import export-businessman, understandably had different ideas.

A rolling car chase around town ensued between the Rat Purifiers and other revolutionary brigades that now make up Benghazi police. The show lasted from late afternoon until the early morning hours and was punctuated by frequent and escalating salvos of shooting, including the use of heavy caliber anti-aircraft guns. The net result of all this sturm und drang was exactly two persons injured...by stab wounds. Benghazi's revolutionaries either have preposterous aim or were not actually trying to hit each other.

Most of the grave violence that has occurred in Libya has instead been in its far-off, sparsely populated and chronically overlooked desert south, a region known since Ottoman times as Fezzan. Over the past century, none of the Libya's rulers, from Libya's fascist-era colonialists through Qaddafi, have been able to fully control Libya's slice of the Sahara. Today an engrained vacuum of state authority strikes the visitor to this marginalized region. Post-revolution there is a near free flow of people and weapons across southern Libya's now un-policed borders and it is unwise to travel without local escorts.

On my own late March trip to southwest Libya to attend a gathering of the nomadic Tuareg people, the roads were filled with excited and heavily armed tribe members. Sometimes known as the shy people, the Tuareg presented a dramatic picture garbed in their traditional flowing robes topped by colorful and intricate headgear that covers their entire faces except for the eyes. The convoy that I joined up with somewhat disconcertingly kept exchanging greetings of loud bursts of celebratory gunfire with checkpoint guards as we sped on our way through the desert.

In late 2011, following the success of the revolution, Libya's new rulers inherited the challenges posed by Fezzan. The biggest post-revolutionary toll of violence in the entire country has been in the southeastern town of Kufra. Here a series of battles between the rival tribes of the Arab Zway and black African desert farmers called the Tebou have left over a 150 dead. Separate clashes between the Tebou and another Arab tribe in the Fezzanian capital of Sabha caused 50 more to lose their lives in late March. Living conditions in the neighborhood of Tayuri where much of the latter fighting occurred are basic; many residents lack citizenship papers and live only in flimsy tin shacks. Having been hosted in Tayuri for the night on my trip to the south, reports in the Libyan media of the firing of mortars into this rickety locality are hard to absorb.

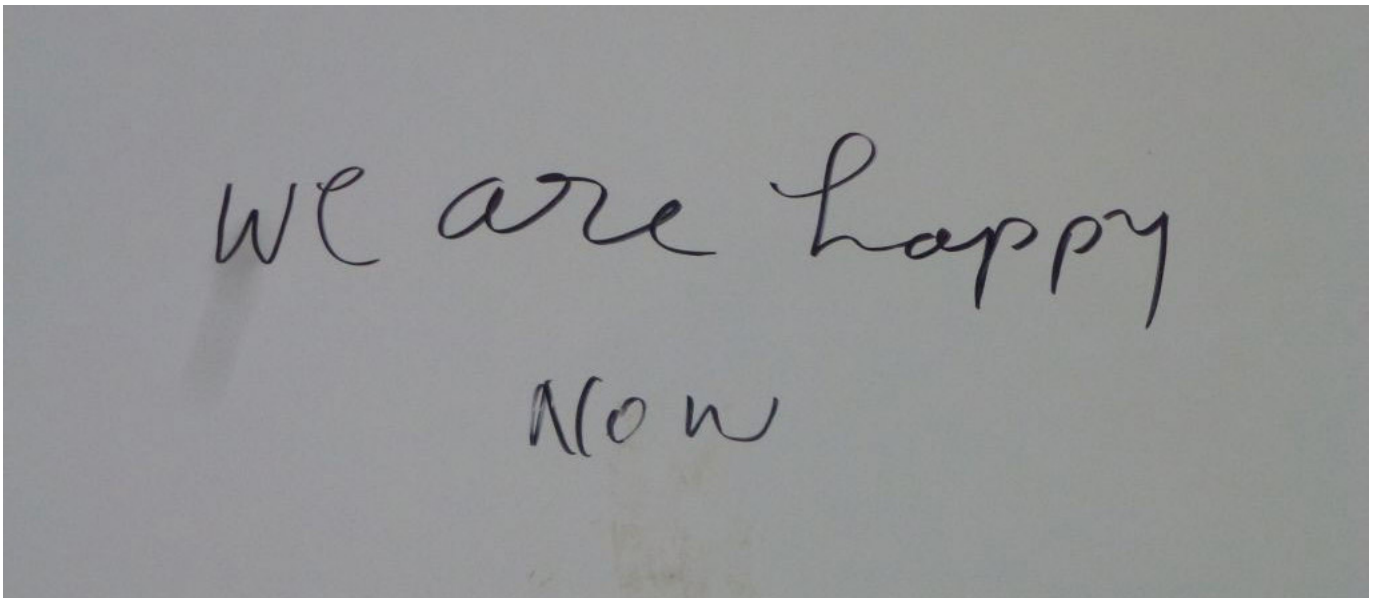
Further southwest, along the old trans-Sahara caravan route, the ancient town of Ghadames is known as "the pearl of the desert" and was named a world heritage site by the United Nations. Today multiple skirmishes between the Tuareg and sedentary town residents over control of the local governing council have sadly damaged one of the Sahara's oldest medinas. There have also been ramifications beyond Libya's borders. In neighboring Mali, surplus Libyan weapons have fueled the declaration of a breakaway

Tuareg region called Azawad and indirectly contributed to a coup by Malian Army officers frustrated with their democratically elected government's incompetent handling of the Tuareg rebellion.

It is tempting to lay responsibility for this bedlam at the feet of the Libyan revolution. In Kufra, the town that has been the locus of post-revolutionary Libya's most deadly violence, one side backed the revolution from the start (the Tebou) while the other supported Qaddafi (the Zway). But the animosity between these tribes predates the revolution. In 2009, Qaddafi even deployed helicopter gunships to Kufra in a show of force to end fighting between these same two communities. Likewise in recent decades the Brother Leader armed the Tuareg as an internal proxy force and sponsored Tuareg insurgencies in neighboring countries. It's just that few were paying attention to what was happening in these mostly forgotten corners of the Sahara then.

For all the reported (and very often real) chaos in Libya, security along the country's more developed Mediterranean coast that is home to some nine-tenths of its population is actually surprisingly good. Residents in Tripoli and Benghazi remark that on the streets there are far more guns, far less police, ubiquitous protests, and anarchic traffic. But despite all this, most agree that day-to-day security remains much the same and that violence is sporadic rather than targeted.

In the absence of state security forces, social relations and interknit tribal networks provide a precarious balance of power where everybody watches everyone else. In many neighborhoods, brigades of revolutionary fighters are appreciated as the only security providers on offer. Some, like the Purifiers of the Tyrant's Rats have been bad actors. Others have run unofficial detention centers where alleged mercenaries and Qaddafi loyalists are subject to abuse. But many brigades have also positively contributed to the patchwork system of stability by brokering and enforcing local ceasefires.



The greatest votes of confidence in the security situation may be the actions of Libyans themselves. New expensive shop displays and shiny plate glass windows in restaurants are seen not just in the relatively unscathed cities of Tripoli and Benghazi, but also in Misrata and Sirte, where the scars of extended urban warfare are fresh. These investments indicate little fear of a return to full-scale combat. Most striking though were the celebrations of the revolution's one-year anniversary. In Tripoli, several hundred thousand packed into Martyr's Square adjacent to the capital city's old town to release thousands of faerie-like colored floating lanterns in commemoration of the struggle. The Haqqani network in Afghanistan or al Qaeda in Iraq would have seized upon such a large gathering to attempt a spectacular mass casualty attack. In New York's Times Square, the security would have been smothering. In Tripoli, on that night, there were only perfunctory safety measures. And in a country where both explosives and knowledge of how to use them are widespread, the celebration went off without a tremor of trouble.

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Social networks and a balance of arms may be just enough to maintain an unorthodox version of stability in much of Libya. A sense of justice however has proved more elusive.

Demands for political participation, basic freedoms and transparency were at the heart of the Libyan revolution, but there is also an intense desire to see an accounting for the 42 years of Qaddafi's capricious rule. In this environment the lack of a functioning court system is a severe problem after a conflict in which there were not just winners and losers, but victors and vanquished. It may even be a more insidious threat to Libya's future than the more attention grabbing proliferation of weapons.

In Libya's rough and tumble environment, disarmament feels far off. Kalashnikovs provide the only empowerment that young and previously idle revolutionary fighters have ever known. It makes little sense to them to give this up, especially when government always has been and remains something to be distrusted. In a social environment in which advancement and wealth is about who you know, there is deep suspicion that reconciliation is code for giving well-connected Qaddafi officials a free pass to appropriate the revolution. On the street, these perceived opportunists who only abandoned the regime in its final hours even have a name. They are denigrated as the algae, known as such because they are green, parasitic, and grow in swamps.

A common sentiment expressed by prominent revolutionary activist who is now a senior human rights official in Libya's interim government is that there was no civil war in Libya. There was a revolution in which some fought for freedom and others supported a tyrant. Having backed the wrong side, the losers need to bend to the will of the winners. With few police, prosecutors, or judges working, this line of thinking has led the new powers that be to take matters into their own hands.

The darkest facet of the Libyan revolution is an actual physical place.

Motoring east from Misrata along the country's main transport artery, it is unnerving to pass through a town of 30,000 that has been deported of its people and denuded of all moveable items of value. Even the highway signs speak to the erasure of Tawergha, with the name of the town either spray painted over or shot out using automatic weapons.

Earth embankments have been constructed on the turn-offs to Tawergha to discourage both returnees and curious passers-by. But it is possible to get around them to view this relic of a town. Most buildings in Tawergha have been burned from the inside to make them uninhabitable and are empty of all material things. The streets are similarly apocalyptic, with scattered handfuls of torched cars and telephone and electricity poles stripped of their wires. There is extensive graffiti scrawled on the walls of the structures still standing, much of it virulently racist or renaming the town misrata jadeeda ("New Misrata").

Tawergha had a difficult history even prior to the revolution. Originally inhabited by black African cast-offs from the 19th century slave trade, Tawerghis were kept as owned slaves in Misrata until Libyan King Idris al-Sannoussi reportedly put a stop to the practice in the 1960s. During recent times, Misratis describe Tawergha as dependent upon Misrata for everything from education to livelihoods. Qaddafi reportedly sought to capitalize on this indentured form of symbiosis by promising Tawerghi leaders land in Misrata if they would help to put down the uprising there.

Whether by force or acquiescence, Tawergha became one of the key staging points for Qaddafi troops in the unsuccessful siege of Misrata upon which the fate of the Libyan revolution turned. It is now a social fact in Misrata that Tawerghis did not stop at fighting

with Qaddafi, or even looting and killing in Misrata's outlying neighborhoods. In Libya's conservative society, Misratis accuse Tawerghi fighters of the unforgiveable: committing widespread rape. In Misrata's eyes this is a crime so unspeakable that it is no longer possible for the two communities to live side by side. Man, woman, and child alike, Tawergha is treated as collectively guilty of war crimes.

As a Misrati military commander told a western newspaper after breaking the siege of his city and preparing to oust Qaddafi troops from Tawhergha, residents of the latter should prepare to flee since "Tawergha no longer exists, only Misrata."

Tawergha is an extreme case, but illustrative of the Hobbesian state of nature that develops without the mainstay of courts to enforce laws. Utterly subordinated, Tawerghis lack the political or military recourse to challenge the brutal conditions imposed upon them.

Other loyalist towns or tribes in Libya possess greater military assets and the possibility of political alliances. They have some wherewithal to push back when their now ascendant pro-February 17th neighbors overstep in using the front of revolutionary credentials to settle old feuds or infringe on their municipal rights. In most of these cases, mass deportations have been avoided. But instead the armed clashes that litter the news headlines on Libya have bloomed.

In Misrata, respected tribal elders and religious sheikhs who have tried to promote reconciliation with Tawergha have been turned away. This is in large part because Misratis view themselves as victims of war crimes in need of justice. They do not want reconciliation plans but activation of mechanisms for the prosecution and punishment of alleged Tawerghi malfeasance. Misrata's community leaders claim that only once trials start will it become possible to begin talking about reconciliation. Likewise, in the host of other more symmetrical local conflicts around Libya, warring parties claim that there must be a clear reckoning for their opponents' crimes in order to halt the cycle of violence and revenge.

To be sure, the tighter control of weapons and armed groups is vital to the future of Libya. But it also may not yet be realistic in a highly unsettled landscape. In the meantime, reconciliation is indeed about more than just prosecutions. But in Libya, getting the police and judicial machinery running is not only about safeguarding the most vulnerable. It might also be the precursor to the powerful entertaining thoughts of reconciliation.

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In the chaotic environment of the new Libya it is quite an assertion to make, but politics might just be the most opaque and confused arena. Qaddafi's philosophy on government rejected the idea of a nation state in favor of purported direct rule by the people. His Green Book described parliaments as the "contemporary model of dictatorship" that rob the public of their right to govern themselves. Political parties also did not come in for an easy time. The Brother Leader described them as the "abortion of democracy" and instruments to divide the community by ensuring "the rule of the part over the whole."

Other Arab autocrats may have subverted elections and ignored their constitutions, but in most places there was at least experience with the motions of voting and shells of legislatures. Libya toiled in another universe altogether, one in which an array of local popular councils, communes, and revolutionary committees "governed." In practice, membership in these bodies was mandatory and their primary purpose to demonstrate loyalty to the person of the Brother Leader and Revolutionary Guide.

As Libya's first plebiscite in 42 years approaches the popular mood is a mix of fulfillment, confusion, and even a little apprehension. Ordinary people are excited to vote as the culmination of the revolution and have flocked in the millions to register. They feel a genuine burden to select the right people for building a modern state but are not sure how to cast their ballot or what they are voting for (a constitutional assembly rather than president). Participants at workshops on elections that my former organization held across Libya repeat straightforward but profound questions that are difficult to answer: What is the purpose of political parties? How do I decide who to vote for? And, most earnestly, how can I be sure they will do a good job once elected? If only we knew.

The most likely outcome from the historic polls is a fragmented polity that mirrors the state of Libyan society. A sense of Libyan nationalism and even geographic regional identities do exist. This is especially the case in the traditional and socially cohesive east of the country. But the most salient level of political and military organization in Libya remains its sea of tribes, towns, and even city neighborhoods. The map of the country's electoral districts reflects this hodgepodge and was seemingly drawn by the transitional authorities to ensure that these local powerbrokers have seats to represent their specific interests. Political parties meanwhile remain in their infancy, meaning that many will vote for candidates they personally know or are socially connected to rather than based on ideology or political conviction.

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Regardless of the electoral outcome, one guarantee is that Islam will be an integral part of Libya's social and political path. It is a deeply devout country where Islam is almost universally seen to play a positive and unifying role among other more centrifugal forces. Libyans describe themselves as conservative when it comes to their beliefs, but are steadfastly opposed to extremism. In Libya's eastern Green Mountains, an elderly religious sheikh who has twice completed the hadj pilgrimage to Mecca summed this up by stating his hope that "you and the world understand that Libyans are not obsessed with anything, including religion."

There is also a clear distinction in Libyans' minds between personal observance, modesty and piety on the one hand and political Islam on the other. As one young, educated, English-speaking medical student in Benghazi explained, "Islam is part of our nature and society, it is a pure thing built into our souls and habits." He was adamant that Libyans did not need anyone, least of all a political party or the government, to tell them how to be proper Muslims.

These two sentiments help to explain a paradox of Libya's elections: no one wants to be identified as a secularist. But no one wants to be identified as an Islamist either.

Secularism is understood in the Libyan context as being against religion, a political death sentence when Libyans expect Islam to naturally play a role in guiding public and political life. Islam is seen as wholesome and perhaps the only feature of society that was impermeable to corruption under Qaddafi's rule. Many think its social principles are now one of the few safety pins holding the country together during its fragile transition. The organizational head of the Libya's largest coalition of liberal parties went as far as to tell me that you would have to be majnoon (Crazy!) to present a secular platform in Libya. He drolly compared it to walking into St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and shouting that the Vatican should be governed secularly.

At the same time, Libyans sometimes seem to have a stereotypical Middle American's understanding of Islamist movements. They often bracket the Islamists' leading political force, the Muslim Brotherhood, with militant extremists. I have had several absurd feeling conversations arguing with Libyans that, no, actually the Brotherhood is not the same thing as al Qaeda. And, no, its moderate Tunisian offshoot Ennahda, which won the elections there, is not trying to recreate Taliban rule on the Mediterranean.

Perhaps taken aback by this reception, the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood has endeavored to present itself as a national party with an Islamic reference rather than as Islamist first. Its electoral vehicle, the Justice and Building Party, is well organized and will likely win a significant share of the upcoming vote, but faces problems even beyond the extremist label.

In a society in which an Islamic reference for the society already exists to a significant degree, this has little to do with the Brothers' substantive positions. Instead, having been banished into exile during the Qaddafi years, there are widespread suspicions about whether the secretive organization will put Libya or the broader international Brotherhood movement and especially Egyptian interests first in its decision-making. These concerns and even conspiracies are based on Libya's small and oil-rich constitution in comparison to neighboring Egypt being large but poor. Given Egypt's status as the birthplace and headquarters of the Brotherhood, some Libyans suspect that their own branch of the movement may just be a Trojan horse to funnel lucrative contracts and jobs to Cairo.

Thus at the inauguration ceremony of the Libyan Brotherhood's Justice and Building party at a fancy Tripoli hotel ballroom in late May, only passing reference was made to the movement's belief that the state should have an Islamic identity. The word sharia was not even mentioned and there was likewise no explicit call for regional Islamic solidarity. Party leaders' speeches instead were almost entirely devoted to how the party prioritized the project of activating the "prestige" of the state and building the "beloved Libyan homeland."

The net result is little difference between the public positions of both Islamist and liberal parties, with a shared consensus on Libyan nationalism and a moderate Islamic state far from extremism. Defining what moderate Islam exactly means is a thornier question and will surely be a subject of debate when it comes time to write Libya's constitution. But at present, it is fascinating to observe the unusual juxtaposition of clashing political labels with the seemingly minimal divergences in the personal beliefs of Libyan liberals and Islamists.

As an official in a formerly exiled opposition party that now has a mild Islamist label described it, "We're all the same. Libya is an Islamic country full stop. We do not have something like Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 Muslims."

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Libya is astonishingly variegated for such a small and relatively homogenous country. Concisely and cogently summarizing the state of its revolutionary transition is like grasping at smoke. Do you focus on the guns and unaccountable militias, absence of courts and other bedrock institutions, and overall dearth of social trust? Or do you instead give weight to the intense popular underpinning for the revolution, seeming faculty to contain violence despite weak governance, and a brand of politics that is not polarized by either ideology or identity? Even Libyans seem to believe that their transition is too complicated to be cast as moving along the right or wrong path and that reality lies somewhere in between.

It is possible, though, to make a make two early suppositions. The first is that the picture in Libya is brighter than the conventional exposition of a country teetering on the edge of the abyss. After years spent toiling in seemingly intractable war zones, it has been refreshing to work in a place where positive outcomes remain attainable. The second is that many of the serious problems that Libya faces are not of the revolution's making. They rather appear rooted in the country's unique immediate past of Qaddafi's grandiose ambitions and governance of Libya as the antithesis to the modern nation state.

The spate of local violence and fragmented landscape of the new Libya certainly cannot be ignored. Likewise the plight of Tawergha and other now relegated loyalist communities should not fade from the attention of those international powers that back the new Libya. (As a contribution to political reconciliation, international friends of Libya should consider prioritizing technical support to help restart the country's justice system.) Using a wider-angle lens, the direct impact of the Libya revolution's fallout on its immediate neighbors and Mali in particular need also be weighed.

However, the fragmentation of Libyan into town and tribe long preceded last year's uprising. And in Fezzan, the current setting of Libya's worst post-revolutionary fighting has a troubled and violently restive history. And, Qaddafi was not exactly a force for stability in his own backyard. To cite only two examples, in an attempt to spread the model of his jamahiriya, Qaddafi launched a pointless war with Chad in the 1980s that spilled into Darfur and helped ignite a genocidal conflict. Meanwhile his notorious World Revolutionary Center near Benghazi provided support and training to such luminaries as ex-Liberian President Charles Taylor, recently convicted by the International Criminal Court of some of the "most heinous and brutal crimes recorded in human history."

Any evaluation of the messy aftermath of Libya's revolution must therefore be made against the baseline of the uninviting features of Qaddafi's jamahiriya. It is also worthwhile to consider what the alternative to the clear triumph of the revolutionary opposition over Qaddafi might have looked like. Without the NATO intervention that helped bring a decisive end to last year's conflict, there is little reason to believe that Libya would have escaped becoming enmeshed in a Syria-like slow motion immolation. Moreover Libya's comparative religiosity suggests that in a protracted conflict it would have only been a matter of time before foreign jihadi extremists

descended in number and stolen the possibility of a moderate future for the country.

Instead, for all its myriad traumas, Libya escaped this fate and still has hope. The new Libya and especially the Libyan people even remain capable of moments of grace. Without virtually any international advice and using their own funds, Misrata and Benghazi pulled together near world-class local elections this spring that were more akin to town-wide wedding feasts than dry exercises of civic duty. These votes set important precedents where former revolutionaries willingly stood down in democratic transitions of power. Political activists now seem to mean it when they say that the most important thing about the upcoming national vote is not who wins, but that people participate fully. A spirit of volunteerism still flourishes at the popular level that seems to cut through the chaos and somehow make things work at the very last minute.

A clear-eyed local official in Benghazi did not downplay the challenges his country faces saying, "Qaddafi kept us separated from the world for 42 years. It will not be easy, but we need to make up for all of this lost time." Thanks to their own courage and well calibrated outside backing, Libyans now have that opportunity. What they make of this chance remains to be seen, but after surviving the singular reign of the world's longest ruling non-royal leader their fate is at last in their own hands.

Sean Kane is a Truman Security Fellow. He spent the last half-year in Libya working on conflict resolution and promoting dialogue among Libyans on their political transition.

Chapter 7

NORTH AFRICA

The Unknown Moroccan Islamists

By Avi Spiegel, June 13, 2011

As turmoil swept one Arab country after another, Morocco seemed to offer a distinctive opportunity for peaceful reform initiated by the government and overseen by a popular monarch. But the dreams of Moroccan exceptionalism may soon be dead, or at the very least battered and beaten, like the thousands of protesters taking to the streets of the North African kingdom. Police brutality and repression has reached new heights. And, as has been the case elsewhere, the more police beat them down, the more the protesters of the Arab Spring seem to be picking themselves up and persisting.

Despite all the Moroccan regime has done to hold itself out as unique, its tactics are beginning to appear jarringly familiar. First, it tried denial (Morocco, officials told us, was immune to volatility). Then it tried belittlement (the king first called the protests "demagoguery"). It even tried reform. And as rationale for a bloody crackdown in May, 2011 (which injured dozens and killed one), the government reverted to a favorite authoritarian pretext: the specter of Islamist manipulation.

"The Moroccan government has nothing against the February 20 Movement," the Communications Minister said, using the popular name for Morocco's version of the Arab Spring protest group. "But we suspect its members are being manipulated by the Islamists and the movements of the left." The minister went on to point the finger at one group in particular: the illegal Islamist movement, Al Adl Wal Ihsan or the Justice and Spirituality Organization (JSO). But this should be seen for what it is: one more tactic designed to put off demands for reform. I spent two years on the ground studying JSO and the slew of other Islamist groups in Morocco, and recognize this as a familiar ploy.

In Morocco, as in every country in the region, Islamists represent a diverse, evolving, and messy field. The term "Islamist" could reasonably be applied to the banned JSO; or to the legal political party, the Party of Justice and Development (PJD); or to a bevy of illegal Salafi oriented groups. It could even pertain to the monarchy, which claims direct descent from the Prophet Mohammed and assumes the role of "Commander of the Faithful." As one of PJD's early founders, Mohammed Yatim, once noted: "Our problem in Morocco is not in establishing an Islamic state. Theoretically and constitutionally, this state is already [one]."

It is not "Islamists" in general that the government has a problem with, but rather simply the ones that openly challenge the status quo. In a divide which echoes the cautions of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the early days of that uprising, the legal party, PJD, has largely remained ambivalent. Many of its members still cling to the increasingly anachronistic conviction that political change is most effectively pursued from within the system. This has been that movement's hallmark since (or, indeed, as a basis for) its licensed admission into the electoral system in 1997. While PJD shares historical and ideological commonalities with the Muslim Brotherhood, it has also spoken fawningly of Turkey's AKP Party, with whom it shares its very name (in Arabic).

The JSO, by contrast, has wholeheartedly embraced the Arab Spring. Because JSO is largely unknown outside Morocco, it is an easy target. For years as the largest opposition force in Morocco, JSO may very well be the least understood Islamist group in the world. It has certainly belied casuistic categorizations of religio-political activism. The JSO is illegal but nonviolent, repressed but thriving. Its members boycott elections, but are also politically engaged. And while nonviolence is one of the group's three core precepts, it has not shied away from calling for the overthrow of the Moroccan regime and for an entirely new constitutional system. Such sentiments were, until 2011, almost unheard of in Morocco.

The JSO was officially formed more than three decades ago by Abdeslam Yassine, who now serves as its spiritual guide, or murshid. Despite Yassine's background with the prominent Boutchichiya Sufis, his writings are as varied as they are prolific, engaging with Sufism, Salafism, and even Marxism. Young members have been known to cite both Yassine and Samuel Huntington in a single sentence. While the group is organized, in part, like a traditional Sufi brotherhood, it also functions increasingly like a modern political party, replete with a political wing (or "circle"), official spokespeople, complex organizational charts, internal elections, and multiple websites.

As is often the case with illegal movements, estimates of JSO's size are notoriously unreliable. PJD's secretary general once shrewdly speculated that his rival only had around 5,000 followers; authorities have suggested that it's closer to 50,000. I've even heard JSO's own activists invoke the word "million." The actual number of both members and supporters probably doesn't exceed 200,000.

But regardless of the precise figure, JSO is the only group that has had past experience in mobilizing multiple and simultaneous unpermitted protest marches in cities throughout the country, similar to the kinds seen in 2011. As far back as 2005, a young activist in the group bragged to me about their unmatched prowess at text messaging and web-based mobilization: "We can bring thousands to the streets at the press of a button. No one else can do that here." (Indeed, the one person killed in recent protests was a member

of JSO.) So, while the February 20 movement is a wide compilation of voices from the left to the right, it is no coincidence that its anti-regime marches would include JSO. But news of JSO involvement would only be shocking to those outside Morocco.

The U.S. government, for one, has not had much luck or interest in figuring the group out. A classified 2008 cable to Washington from the embassy in Rabat — released via Wikileaks — revealed that diplomats couldn't even figure out what to call the group (was it Justice and Charity Organization or the Justice and Spirituality Organization?). The authors also seemed shocked that JSO "may be moving toward political participation" —even though the formation of its "Political Circle" had taken place a full decade earlier. This confusion was understandable. The embassy admitted that it had not had any communication with the group for at least seven years — because the last time they tried to make contact with JSO, the Moroccan government "protested." In a practice that has become only too common, the United States relied on a foreign government to determine which of its nationals it would engage.

Like most everyone in Morocco and the Arab world, JSO is still figuring out how to adjust to this new political context. They are no longer the sole opposition force in the country. They are now merely part of a much larger force for change — and they are no longer operating in the shadows. Don't forget that it was only six years ago when Nadia Yassine (a spokesperson for the group and the founder's daughter) was brought to court for simply suggesting in a newspaper interview that Morocco could function as a "republic." Moreover, until 2011, JSO was alone in calling for the king to relinquish his position as Commander of the Faithful; now such a message can be seen on protest signs. JSO's new role in the spotlight has, at least, sparked it to state publicly its goals more firmly than ever before. Nadia Yassine declared in June 2011 that her movement favored a "civil" over a "religious state." Such statements are reassuring, but still tell us little about the policies they would actually promote.

The Moroccan government says that JSO is using the Arab Spring — the call of democracy — to further its own nefarious agenda in hopes of splintering the February 20 movement. But spokespeople for the February 20 movement have responded that they won't be manipulated by anyone — and that the group, even while including Islamists, was "peaceful," "open," and "independent." JSO, for its part, says it is simply being used as a scapegoat to justify a violent crackdown. But one thing is certain: if the regime engages in bloody crackdowns, the protests will only continue. It cannot pledge reform one week and then kill protesters the next, even if the marchers include prominent "Islamists."

Avi Spiegel is an assistant professor of political science at the University of San Diego and a fellow at the Strauss Center for International Security and Law at the University of Texas, Austin. He is currently writing a book on young Islamists and the Arab Spring.

Showdown in Morocco

By Hisham al-Miraati, May 26, 2011

The *makhzen* refers to an ancient institution in Morocco — the extended power apparatus close to the Moroccan monarchy, made up of a network of power and privilege. It allows the king to act as an absolute monarch and the de facto head of the executive. Beneath the give and take of everyday politics, the *makhzen* has always been the ultimate guarantor of the status quo. For three months, the pro-democracy youth movement, known as "February 20," has been advocating against that status quo. Protests have not been targeting the monarchy directly, but instead have been urging for reform that would yield a system in which the king reigns but does not rule.

What started as a small group on Facebook early in 2011 grew into a nationwide movement made up of a loose coalition of leftists, liberals and members of the conservative Islamist right. Inspired by the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings and powered by new media, the movement convinced hundreds of thousands to take to the streets. The demonstrations held week in, week out, were remarkably peaceful. In response, King Mohammed VI promised a package of constitutional reforms to be submitted to a referendum in June 2011. But as protesters, unconvinced by the king's promise, have vowed to keep up pressure on the regime, authorities seem increasingly impatient and determined to break up protests violently, paving the way toward escalation and confrontation with the street. The middle class is joining the mass of demonstrators, moving the protests beyond the core of mobilized youth. Their target is the *makhzen* — which has become a code word for the monarchy's abuses of power and monopoly over large sectors of the economy.

Protests are not new in Morocco. During the Cold War years, leftists who dared to stand up and denounce the regime's abuses of power saw the wrath of the *makhzen* befall them. Those who were lucky enough not to have disappeared suffered the worst abuses, or were thrown into secret prisons in the middle of the desert. But in the age of Internet and new information technologies, the regime knows well that its actions are closely watched and that the indiscriminate repression of the "Years of Lead" (a name commonly used in Morocco to refer to the dark era of repression under late King Hassan II) are virtually impossible to hide from the public eye. This partly explains the inconsistency of its handling of the tension in the street.

From the start, the protest movement indentified key areas where reform is much needed: poverty, corruption, injustice, and the control of political and economic life by the monarch's close entourage and some privileged families accused of misuse of public funds. The regime's response was tempered and conciliatory at first. In an attempt to quell popular anger, King Mohammed VI gave a speech on March 9, 2011 in which he announced the appointment of a committee to revise the Moroccan Constitution, pledging to relinquish parts of his prerogatives, while setting the outlines of permissible change. The status of the monarchy was to remain untouched, while the king was to supervise the reform process.

The proposed reform plan did not convince everyone and many decided to continue their protests. Skeptical youth doubted that the process initiated by the king was compatible with fundamental popular demands, such as the drafting of a whole new constitution by an elected assembly. Protesters have also been calling for the dissolution of the parliament, the dismissal of the current government, the release of all political prisoners, the clear separation of powers and the trial of officials involved in cases of torture and corruption. Amid continuing street protests, the palace offered a series of reforms, including the release of 190 political prisoners, mainly Islamist and human rights activists.

But then on April 28, 2011, a terrorist bomb attack hit a popular restaurant in the heart of Marrakech, killing 17 people. The country was plunged into a state of shock. Beyond the unanimous condemnation, the timing of the attack raised many questions. The fear of a security clampdown and a freeze of liberties were the main concerns of pro-democracy advocates. Their fear is justified. The *makhzen* has traditionally actively sought to nurture an image of stability — an exception to the turmoil in the Arab world. That strategy has worked for a time for the regime: Morocco is routinely praised by western officials as an ally of the West in a rather hostile region. The country holds an advanced status with the European Union; it has signed a free trade agreement with the United States; it is actively cooperating with the United States in its global "War on Terror;" and it enjoys the status of a Major Non-NATO Ally. The specter of terrorism has long been a useful card for gaining external support.

Police violence has escalated. On May 15, 2011, peaceful demonstrators who wanted to protest in front of an alleged secret detention center in Temara (dubbed Guan-Temara by protesters) near the capital, Rabat, faced repression. A week later, anti-riot police systematically and violently disrupted peaceful gatherings in public squares. This may be the sign that the regime is shifting its attitude toward the street and taking a much more hardline stance. As with other Arab regimes, the *makhzen* faces a dilemma: if it clamps down hard on peaceful protesters, it risks loosing its reputation as a model of democratic reform in a region often perceived in the West as averse to the liberal ideals of democracy. If it loosens up, then it will have to face the challenge to its own existence posed by a determined and organized street.

The "February 20" youth movement is vowing to keep up street pressure, rejecting the king's offer of token reform. If the regime insists on denying the people their rights of assembly and free expression, then the country will be heading toward the unknown. Against the backdrop of the Arab revolutions, change looks inevitable. It is still in the power of the monarchy to ensure a peaceful transition and at the same time ensure its own survival. The more the *makhzen* drags its feet, the more it runs the risk of undermining the stability of the country and, at the end of the day, its own existence.

Hisham al-Miraat is the co-founder of Talk Morocco and a contributing author for Global Voices.

Shakira vs The Democrats

By Laila Lalami, May 19, 2011

Spring in Morocco means longer, warmer days, jacarandas in bloom, the taste of grilled fish, the smell of escargots wafting from street corners — and music festivals. Nearly every city in the kingdom has one, designed to reflect its unique culture and musical taste. The Gnaoua festival in Essaouira attracts fans of jazz, rock, and fusion; L'Boulevard in Casablanca is popular with lovers of hip-hop; the Festival of World Sacred Music in Fez is for aficionados of spiritual music. But the largest, and the best funded, of all the music festivals in Morocco is Mawazine, which takes place in May in Rabat, the capital, and which features huge stars from across different musical genres. In 2011, Lionel Richie, Amr Diab, Kanye West, and Shakira were all scheduled to perform.

Ten years ago, Mawazine was a small festival that had trouble finding financiers for its sound-and-lights show, but it has quickly grown in size, dwarfing all the other musical events in the country. Its current budget is reportedly as high as $12 million. Perhaps not coincidentally, scandals and controversy have dogged it. Last year, for instance, there were calls by members of the Party of Justice and Development (PJD), a religious party in parliament, to ban Elton John because his appearance would be "promoting homosexuality." (In the end, Elton John performed to sold-out crowds, and there have been no reports of Moroccan men suddenly turning gay as a result of their attendance.) In 2009, 11 people were killed in a stampede at Hay Nahda sports stadium, after a performance by the musician Abdelaziz Stati. (An investigation of the accident is still pending.)

This year, Mawazine has become the focal point of a debate over the powers of the country's governing elite. The February 20 protest movement, which has been calling for constitutional reforms that limit the powers of the king, has made Mawazine one of its targets. In April 2011, the activists issued a statement asking artists to cancel their scheduled appearances. The large sums of money allocated to Mawazine, the statement said, would be better spent on schools, hospitals — or arts infrastructure that would contribute to sustainable cultural growth for all Moroccans. Slogans repeated during street marches throughout the kingdom in the months

leading up to Mawazine included some directed at the festival: "Where is the people's money? In Mawazine and celebrations." (This rhymes in Arabic.) Facebook groups with names such as "Tous Contre Mawazine" or "stop mawazine" cropped up.

It's not difficult to see why the February 20 movement has chosen to make Mawazine one of its issues. The festival is organized by Maroc-Cultures, an organization headed by King Mohammed VI's business manager, Mohamed Mounir Majidi. Majidi is also the managing director of ONA-SNI, Morocco's largest business firm, with interests in mining, telecommunications, and real estate, among many other areas. He is an unpopular figure who in has become a symbol of corruption, his picture pasted on protest signs with "WANTED" printed across. Other signs have depicted ONA as an octopus, with tentacles reaching across different sectors of the economy.

But, aside from its association with Majidi, Mawazine also riles up Moroccans with its ostentatious displays. Imagine if, like 15 percent of Moroccans, you and your family lived on less than $2 per day. Three loaves of bread and a bottle of milk cost about as much as that — never mind housing, health care, or education. Imagine if, like a large majority of working Moroccans, you were paid the standard minimum wage of 10.64 dirhams per hour; that's almost exactly the price of a liter of gasoline. (Assuming, of course, you've saved up the tens of thousands of dirhams it takes to buy a car.) Imagine, now, if you found out that Shakira was paid 6.5 million dirhams to perform — nearly a million dollars.

There are others, however, who support Mawazine as a rare opportunity for the public to see Moroccan and international music stars perform locally. They argue that many of the scheduled concerts are free. They point out that the festival is funded by business sponsors and that only a small percentage of its budget comes from the government. In an interview with *TelQuel* magazine, Aziz Daki, spokesperson and artistic director for Mawazine, said that those who oppose Mawazine are "demagogues" who keep an "obscurantist discourse." And, just as there are anti-Mawazine groups on Facebook, there are pro-Mawazine groups as well.

It is true that Mawazine has many private sponsors, but these come at a much higher long-term cost for the country. In a lawsuit filed in Michigan, Peter Barker-Homek, former CEO of the energy company Taqa, alleges that he was asked by his employers to pay $5 million per year to unnamed Moroccan officials in order to finance a music festival. (Although the festival is not named, it is widely believed to be Mawazine.) In exchange, Taqa would be allowed to extend its electrical plant in Jorf Lasfar, a commercial port on the Atlantic Coast. The behind-the-scenes business deals are particularly relevant now, in the middle of a popular protest movement that has made an end to corruption a central demand.

The Moroccan government's official position with regard to the reform movement mirrors that of Dr. Pangloss in *Candide*: All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Khalid Naciri, spokesperson for the government, repeatedly declared that Morocco has long been engaged in a process of reform. The March 9, 2011 speech in which the king announced some constitutional reforms was part of this long-standing process, he said, and not a response to the street protests. In this context, the show must go on.

And while the show goes on, the Moroccan government can continue to deny that it practices torture, and its police can continue their brutal harassment of political activists, including, and especially, activists of the February 20 movement.

Laila Lalami, the author of Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits and Secret Son, is associate professor of creative writing at the University of California, Riverside.

Morocco's Islamist Prime Minister

By Avi Spiegel, December 5, 2011

The first elected Islamist party to take over the reins of government in the Arab world arrived in the unlikely location of Morocco. The Party of Justice and Development (PJD) finished first in the November 25, 2011 elections, gaining 107 of 395 seats in parliament. Their leader, Abdullah Benkirane, will now ascend to what was once considered an unthinkable position for an Islamist: he will be the country's prime minister.

The Moroccan case challenges conventional wisdom about contemporary Islamists and contextualizes qualms about what they might do next. The PJD originated as an offshoot of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. But while the Brotherhood only formed an official political party in 2011, their Moroccan brothers have been contesting elections and navigating party politics since 1998. Far from being revolutionary or even incendiary, Islamists of the PJD rose to the top not by challenging the status quo, but rather by skillfully and pragmatically abiding by it, even at times bolstering it. Their rule will likely be no different.

The first time I visited the headquarters of Morocco's main Islamist party was in 2006, a year away from its second full run in parliamentary elections. I was greeted by the unexpected sounds of laughter, as three young activists sat in the corner of the courtyard poking fun at a more senior member. "If you could have any ministerial position in government," one asked him, "which one would you choose?" Before he could answer, a voice from the distance shouted, "Why not minister of tourism!" And then the chuckles began. It was funny for them because back then it seemed so farfetched — farfetched that the king would ever deign to ask them to serve as the public face of the country, especially overseas. They would, another joked, more likely scare away visitors then beckon them.

The Moroccan monarchy's gamble on limited political reforms is what made these daydreams a reality. When authoritarian leaders across the region in 2011 were folding or doubling down, the king of Morocco opted for watered down reform. Beginning in March 2011, in an effort to co-opt local protests, government officials in Morocco told anyone who would listen that the king was going to great lengths to share his immense power. They then heralded his constitutional reforms that would, for example, ensure that the king would actually appoint the next prime minister based solely on election results (rather than deciding himself, as has been known to happen).

But, in fact, the actual constitutional changes approved in a popular referendum in July 2011 left the core elements of monarchical supremacy intact. Every Moroccan — regardless of his or her political views — will readily admit that the king still runs the show. Anything resembling a budding democracy, or even a constitutional monarchy on the model of Spain or England, is still a long way away for this North African kingdom.

Perhaps because the political reforms proved so limited, the elections that followed exhibited neither the enthusiasm nor the dynamism of its neighbors in the region. Many activists opted to boycott. Turnout was low at 45 percent. The percentage of spoiled ballots, on the other hand, was high (some estimates suggest up to one third). And both of these figures were not drastically off from where they were in 2007.

Such a managed, limited democratic façade did not bother the PJD. Throughout the last decade, these Islamists readily went along with what can only be thought of as a puppeted political process. Authorities allowed them to participate in elections, but very clearly set specific limitations on their behavior. The palace, for instance, permitted the PJD to campaign, but state media regularly lobbied against its efforts. The party could field candidates, but it was often told how many seats it could contest, especially in 2003, following bombings in Casablanca. Also, the Moroccan government devised an electoral system so complex and multilayered that it became close to impossible for any single party to garner an outright majority. Nevertheless, the PJD ignored nay saying from other Islamists in the country; they chose to embrace elections instead of reject them.

The PJD were just as submissive when it came to the supposedly revered role of religion. When the palace intensified pressure against "religious parties," the PJD eschewed the label "Islamist." They opted, instead, to call themselves a party of "Islamic reference." They also agreed not to campaign in mosques. In fact, before the interior ministry permitted them to take part in elections in the late 90s, the party had to agree to certain ground rules. Most significantly, the king at the time, Hassan II, made clear that they would have to avoid "heresy" — by which he meant, in language obvious to all citizens, there would be no religious challenges to the regime.

The PJD, in sum, seldom bit the hand that fed them. In fact, labeling such Islamist parties as "opposition" movements might even be somewhat misleading. For they saved their harshest verbal attacks, their sharpest criticism, not for those in charge, but for those they competed against: Leftists and outlawed Islamists. They sold themselves mainly as alternatives within the system — as substitutes to the enervated and corrupt parties of yesteryear. Once in parliament, the PJD tried to shame these lackluster parties by taking attendance during open sessions. It even supported punishing those members of parliament who were absent.

Most significantly, unlike their Egyptian counterparts, the PJD has not displayed any ability or even desire to currently challenge or confront state authority. Indeed, in the midst of the Arab Spring, in the midst of the most historic protests in the modern history of Morocco (and, of course, the region), the PJD stood by the monarchy — even when the other major Islamist group in the country, the banned Justice and Spirituality Organization, led marches to oppose it.

It therefore should come as no surprise that when the future Islamist prime minister of Morocco, Abdullah Benkirane, initially ascended to the position of party head in 2008, one of the first people to congratulate him was none other than the king. The monarch's praise was a reminder of the Islamist leader's track record of working with, not against, the regime. Benkirane had long exhibited, the king pointed out, a "desire to put the supreme interests of the nation and just causes above all other considerations."

After the PJD's first place finish this time around, Benkirane returned the favor. He reminded citizens that the real head of state in the country is the king. He said this, of course, in an effort to allay fears of an Islamist takeover. But he also, in the process, managed to admit the shortfalls of recent reforms. How democratic can a country be when the head of the winning party readily admits that his powers are limited?

Yet, both the king and the Islamist leader gained a great deal from these results. Benkirane, of course, earned the highest elected office in the country. But, by begrudgingly appointing him, the king showed that he was holding firm to his new constitution. Together, they now have an opening to put forward a new partnership of Islamist governance: one in which a monarch imposes a considerable check on the prospect of unbridled Islamist power.

This was not a difficult sell to many young Islamists. There has been good reason, after all, for the PJD to stand by the regime all this time. Party activists wanted to continue to reap the spoils of electoral inclusion: the jobs, the generous state electoral funding, the fancy party conventions, even the respect that comes with wearing suits and campaigning for office. During my two years of field research among young Islamists in Morocco, PJD activists would often tell me: "We are here because we have a future in the party." In a country of mass unemployment, where young people's futures are far from certain, this was a powerful inducement.

They also, of course, wanted to continue to hold the government positions they already had. And they carried out these jobs in much the same manner in which they had procured them in the first place: with disciplined pragmatism. The party's outbursts of hysterics tend to get the lion's share of media attention, such as when its affiliated newspaper blamed the Asian Tsunami on sinning Asians or when Benkirane lashed out at a camerawoman in parliament for her immodest attire. But, for the most part, the party's stabs at governance have been noteworthy largely for their lack of excitement.

The PJD candidates who held local office made fighting corruption and reorganizing city finances to eliminate waste their overarching themes. When a PJD candidate was elected the mayor of Kenitra, a city north of Rabat, one of his first major acts in office, for example, was to digitize municipal records. His rise was particularly telling: while serving as head of the PJD's youth wing (the biggest of any party in the country) he also held a desk job doing tech support for the prime minister's office — back when the prime minister was a Socialist. He then went on to serve as an advisor on outsourcing to the economic affairs minister.

This yearning to get to work — more to the point, to do the work of governing — has long characterized the party, and there is little reason to believe that this will abate. At the headquarters following their second place finish in 2007, as party elites debated whether to join the government as a junior partner or remain outside it, young Islamists were heard making the surprising (and ultimately unsuccessful) case for the former. The rank and file, they said, could not go another five years without government jobs and related patronage. Now they won't have to wait any longer.

Avi Spiegel is an assistant professor of political science at the University of San Diego and is completing a book on the rise of young Arab Islamists.

A second chance for Algeria's Islamists

By Karina Piser, April 18, 2012

Algeria has thus far kept a relatively low profile amidst sweeping regional change in the Middle East and North Africa. The oil-rich country, often characterized as "untouched" by the Arab Spring, saw no Tahrir Square or Avenue Habib Bourguiba, and, accordingly, has drawn minimal attention from international media. Although Algerians do not loath Abdelaziz Bouteflika like Libyans did Muammar al-Qaddafi or Egyptians did Hosni Mubarak, they do have similar grievances — high unemployment, inadequate housing, and a dearth of social services. A recent increase in protests across the country that have resulted in clashes with security forces reflect growing social anxiety, and a number of attempted self-immolations, including one just over a week ago in the Tiaret governorate, reveal that Algerians are actively interested in effectuating change. A cursory look at the situation might therefore suggest, as has some recent analysis, that revolution looms; a closer examination reveals that, at least for the moment, this is probably not in the cards. But while an increasing trend of social discontent will likely not yield drastic change from below, it may motivate Algerians, who have a history of abstention, to turn out in greater numbers in the legislative elections to be held in May, hoping to cast their votes for a party that will address their demands.

As transitioning North African countries are increasingly impacted by a rise of political Islam and bourgeoning democratic consciousness, Algerian authorities are preparing for the country's legislative elections and hedging their bets against a similar fate. Like its neighboring (fallen) regimes, whose distaste for religion translated to authoritarian secularism, Bouteflika's government is haunted by the memory of the *tragedie nationale*, and, dominated by the National Liberation Front (FLN), promotes a staunchly anti-Islamic leadership. The highly secretive political and military elite, known as *Le Pouvoir* (the powers-that-be), has been referred to as dubiously democratic, and most recently passed a series of laws that, superficially, could signal an opening of sorts for the political spectrum and progress toward more transparent governance. Now passed, these reforms, which Bouteflika promised in April 2011 as an attempt to prevent upheaval, serve as the framework under which the legislative elections will occur.

Historically of course, *Le Pouvoir*'s democratic gestures have hardly been a boon for opposition parties. When, in 1989, the political system expanded from a one-party rule, dominated by the FLN, to a multiparty system, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) emerged and garnered enough support to win the first round of elections. Rather than respect the electoral results, however, the military intervened, cancelling the second round. While the regime attributes the decade of violence that followed solely to the FIS and the Armed Islamic Movement (MIA) that it spawned, the suffocation of a nascent democratic process was unambiguous. The FIS's brief entry into politics therefore marks an important landmark in the country's history and provides insight into both the regime's hardline approach to opposition parties and a population wary of political change; it would be naïve to let either regional transformations or Algeria's domestic reforms overshadow the reality of *Le Pouvoir*'s stern grip on power.

Western officials have lauded Bouteflika's "reforms," praising Algerian authorities for taking initiative toward democracy. Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mourad Medelci paid visits to international leaders, showcasing the reform process as another monumental Arab Spring moment. But beneath new laws that "impressed" French Minister of the Interior Claude Guéant and that U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called "very significant" are highly restrictive texts, both regarding political parties and members of civil society. A new law pertaining to political parties bars former FIS members from political participation, and bans anyone "responsible for manipulating religion in directing the national tragedy" from running in parliamentary, legislative, or presidential elections. Despite these blatantly anti-democratic undertones, the party law was still liberal enough to drastically open the political landscape, granting approval to numerous parties for the first time in decades, many of which are Islamist. This seemingly generous gesture may well be a deliberate attempt to disperse Islamist parties, mitigating their chances for success.

But some Islamist parties are catching on to *Le Pouvoir*'s agenda. The Movement for a Society of Peace (MSP), an Islamist party and, up until recently, a member of the presidential alliance, decided to withdraw from the coalition. Upon withdrawal, party leader Bouguerra Soltani called on other Islamist parties to coalesce, and the resulting Green Alliance, which unites the MSP, al Islah and

Ennahda, could give religious parties greater weight come May. Although the moderate MSP has traditionally been perceived to be a puppet of the regime, its withdrawal, attributed to the president's insufficient reforms, may give it a new, autonomous edge. The party, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood which supported Bouteflika's bid for reelection in 2009, is now energized by Islamist victories in Tunisia and Morocco and empowered to divorce itself from the majority.

As Algeria's Islamist camp gears up for the election, the majority, ardently secular FLN continues to disintegrate, plagued by internal disagreements between the party's young members and its old guard. In April, the party's central committee declared a vote of no confidence in FLN secretary general Abdelaziz Belkhadem, and the reform movement within the party, known as the *redresseurs*, announced their intention to present independent candidate lists in May. The next day, a statement from the meeting not only cemented the party's instability heading into the elections, but revealed that, if the reform movement does succeed in gaining sufficient autonomy to present independent candidate lists, it will seek to change the party's trajectory entirely, which will only impede its ability to organize a coherent campaign platform.

While party authorizations in Algeria can hardly be likened to the empowerment of individual political choice that emerged in post-revolutionary Tunisia, Algerian voters, already distanced from the political process, may nonetheless find it possible to find their views expressed in a slowly evolving political environment. If Islamist parties are proactive and campaign aggressively — like Ennahda did last fall in Tunisia — the fragile FLN could find itself trailing behind, unraveled by internal rancor and regional trends that bode well for Islamists. If Algeria's Islamists follow Ennahda's strategy and couch their victory as a top-down, well-organized approach to regenerate Algeria's cultural values, they may succeed in energizing a voter base that might otherwise abstain.

The moderate MSP's role in forming the Green Alliance would also help the party frame political Islam as a source of policy, untangling its association with violence, the *tragedie nationale*, and the MIA that dismissed democratic governance. The alliance

would have to be transparent in presenting a consistent platform, so as not to be associated with the FIS's internal fragmentation and opposing internal factions that ultimately led to its demise. Most importantly, the MSP's inherent organizational advantage over newly established parties, against the backdrop of a dissolving FLN, makes it well poised entering the campaign period.

It must be said that the preceding analysis only matters in a world where elections are fair and transparent according to reasonable standards. Bouteflika's decision to invite international observers and establish a national monitoring commission hints at changes from previous elections which were rife with fraud. But political parties are still skeptical, and pre-election assessment missions from organizations like the National Democratic Institute reveal that, less than a month before election day, numerous electoral provisions and regulations remain undetermined. These scenarios also hinge upon citizen engagement: despite recent attempts from the Interior Ministry to encourage turnout, such as an SMS campaign urging participation, Algerians seem unenthused. Though the meager 36 percent turnout in 2007 in the country's last elections does not bode well for a likely mobilization this time around, the outcome of the May elections remain anyone's guess. The complete scarcity of credible public opinion surveys in a society as opaque as Algeria's makes forming predictions about voter intentions difficult.

These caveats considered, the elections could present an opportunity to shift the political landscape. While Islamist parties may not obtain a majority of seats, they may obtain a plurality. Such a performance, however, would require campaign strategies crafted to attract and energize Algerians skeptical of ties to the regime as well as those still shaken by the bloodbath they associate with political change.

Karina Piser is a Master's student in International Security at Sciences Po in Paris, France.

Chapter 8

THE GULF

Saudi Islamists and the Potential for Protest

By Stéphane Lacroix, June 2, 2011

Saudi Arabia has remained fairly quiet during the recent months of Arab uprisings. A few demonstrations did take place, mostly in the Eastern Province, but never gathered more than a couple thousand. As for the Facebook calls for a "Saudi revolution" on March 11, 2011, they had no real impact on the ground. Some observers found this surprising, given that many of the causes of revolutions elsewhere in the region exist in Saudi Arabia. There is corruption, repression, and, despite the country's wealth, socioeconomic problems that particularly affect the youth — it is said that at least 25 percent of Saudis below age 30 are unemployed.

Some observers argued that nothing had happened, or even could happen, in Saudi Arabia because the kingdom possesses two extraordinary resources in huge quantities. This first is a symbolic resource, religion, through the regime's alliance with the official Wahhabi religious establishment, while the second resource is a material one, oil. These resources, however, have their limits. The real reason that Saudi Arabia has not seen major protests is that the Saudi regime has effectively co-opted the Sahwa, the powerful Islamist network which would have to play a major role in any sustained mobilization of protests.

Neither Islam nor oil wealth necessarily shield the Saudi state from criticism. Religion can be, and has been, contested by opponents of the state, particularly by Islamists. The Wahhabi religious establishment is currently led by relatively weak figures. The current mufti Abd al-Aziz Al al-Shaykh lacks the strong credentials of his predecessor, Sheikh Abd al-Aziz bin Baz. Oil money, however abundant, inevitably creates frustrations because its distribution follows established networks of patronage that favor some over others. This is especially notable at the regional level, where Najd receives much more of the state's largesse than does the kingdom's periphery. What is more, the announcement on March 18, 2011, by King Abdullah of a $100 billion aid package wasn't only met by cheers as some expected. It also provoked angry reactions in some intellectual circles, which saw this as an insult to the Saudis' "dignity."

Saudi Arabia has more of a history of political mobilization than many realize. A pro-democracy current has evolved over the last 10 years. Its core component has historically been the dozens of intellectuals, Sunnis and Shiites, of Islamist and liberal backgrounds who have come together since 2003 to repeatedly demand, through increasingly provocative petitions, the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in the kingdom. Among the latest, and boldest, moves made by members of this group have been the creation in October 2009 of the kingdom's first fully independent human rights organization, the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, and the establishment in February 2011 of the kingdom's first political party, Hizb al-Ummah. Although members of this group have been repressed, many have pledged to continue their activism.

In addition to those older and more experienced intellectuals, a new generation of young political activists is gaining increasing influence. They are connected through social networks, especially Facebook and Twitter, and count among their "friends" numerous young Egyptian and Yemeni activists, whose revolutionary "know-hows" they have been sharing. They are idealistic and bold, and they do not feel bound by old political allegiances. Many have subscribed to the demands for a constitutional monarchy of the older intellectuals, providing them with the young base that they were lacking. In a way, the profile of these young activists is very similar to that of some in the April 6 movement in Egypt. And like the April 6, they could well act as a trigger for change.

But if these young people resemble the April 6 movement, then there exists in Saudi Arabia a group that shares the same characteristics and occupies a similar position in the system as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: The Sahwa (or al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya, the Islamic Awakening) is an Islamist group whose ideology is based on a mix between Wahhabi ideas in religion and the Muslim Brotherhood's ideas in politics.

Like the Brotherhood in Egypt, the Sahwa in Saudi Arabia is by far the largest and best organized non-state group, with arguably hundreds of thousands of members. Its mobilizing capacity is huge, far ahead of any other group, including the tribes which have for the last few decades lost a lot of their political relevance. An illustration of this were the 2005 municipal elections, which provided observers with an unprecedented opportunity to measure the ability of Saudi political actors to mobilize their supporters. In most districts of the major cities, Sahwa-backed candidates won with impressive scores.

It is therefore unlikely that any popular movement would take hold without the Sahwa's support because generating a sustained political challenge to the state requires organized and committed activists, solid mobilizing structures, and networks — things that can't simply be obtained through Facebook and that only the Sahwa can provide. Again, Sahwis are like the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood —They may not start the protest, but it won't succeed without them.

This is where the Saudi case is different from others. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood may have long ceased being a confrontational force when the January 25 revolution started, but it still represented a clear opposition to the Egyptian state. The Sahwa, however, has a different track record. Although its members may be very critical of the Saudi state in private, they have generally remained loyal to it. There is an organic, almost incestuous, relationship that exists between the Sahwa and the Saudi state. While Islamist movements in most countries developed on the margins of the state and against it, the Sahwa was the product of the cooptation of foreign members of the Muslim Brotherhood into the Saudi state in the 1950s and 1960s. It developed and spread from the state, heavily benefiting from the state's structures and resources. The fear of losing this very favorable position that the Sahwa occupies has, until now, represented a key obstacle to its transformation into a real opposition movement.

This explains why the majority of Sahwis have generally remained loyal. For instance, when calls for demonstrations in the kingdom were issued, most Sahwi religious figures came out to denounce them. Some even went so far as to explain that demonstrations were not a legitimate means of asking for change. Aware of the Sahwa's crucial importance, the state has also done all it could to reinforce the relationship: In the $100 billion aid package announced by King Abdullah, there is money for religious institutions, including some known to be Sahwa strongholds.

This does not necessarily mean that there is no potential for protest, however. The Sahwa's history shows that it behaves as a strategic actor. For instance, in the early 1990s, in the wake of the Gulf War, when Islamist figures launched an opposition campaign against the regime, the Sahwa first supported the movement because it thought it could succeed — before eventually withdrawing its support when understanding the risks. This means that in the future, if the Sahwa sees clearly favorable opportunities, it may decide to switch sides and support a protest.

There are already signs that some in the Sahwa may be willing to adopt a more critical posture. Late February 2011, for instance, a petition came out called "Towards a State of Rights and Institutions" asking for democratic change (though expressed in a very conservative language) and signed by a few notable figures associated with the Sahwa, including Salman al-Awda. Also, in late April 2011, a number of other key Sahwa figures, including Nasir al-Umar, signed a text calling for the release of or a fair trial for the country's thousands of "political prisoners," many of whom were arrested on terrorism charges after 2003.

Despite these relatively isolated moves, however, it is unlikely that in the current context the Sahwa would be willing to sacrifice its relations with the regime. There is potential for Islamist protest in Saudi Arabia, but not in the near term. And without the Islamists' participation, it is unlikely that Saudi Arabia will be the scene of the kinds of sustained mobilization that have rocked much of the rest of the Arab world.

Stéphane Lacroix is an assistant professor at Sciences Po and the author of Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia's Shiite Problem

By Toby Matthiesson, March 7, 2012

At least seven young Shiite Muslims have been shot dead and several dozen wounded by security forces in Eastern Saudi Arabia in recent months. While details of the shootings remain unclear, and the ministry of interior claims those shot were attacking the security forces, mass protests have followed the funerals of the deceased. These events are only the latest developments in the decades-long struggle of the Saudi Shiites, which has taken on a new urgency in the context of 2011's regional uprisings — but have been largely ignored by mainstream media.

The events of the Arab Spring have heightened long-standing tensions in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. Just three days after large-scale protests started in Bahrain on February 14, 2011, protests began in the Eastern Province, which is a 30-minute drive across the causeway from Bahrain. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Saudi Interior Ministry vowed to crush the protests with an "Iron Fist" and has unleashed a media-smear campaign against protests and the Shiites in general. While protests subsided over the summer, they started again in October 2011 and have become larger ever since, leading to an ever more heavy-handed response from the security forces.

This repressive response, with distinct rhetorical echoes of Bashar al-Assad's Syrian regime, poses an awkward challenge to recent Saudi foreign policy. The protests of the people in the Eastern Province are as legitimate as the protests in Syria. If Saudi Arabia does not respond to these calls for reform at home how can it seriously claim to rise to the defense of democracy in Syria? The crackdown in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain has given the Iranian and Syrian regime, as well as Shiite political movements in Lebanon and Iraq, a useful rhetorical gambit to push back against their regional rivals.

The Eastern Province is home to virtually all of Saudi Arabia's oil and to a sizeable Shiite minority, estimated at between one and a half and two million people or around 10 percent of Saudi Arabia's citizen population. The Wahhabi creed of Sunni Islam that the

state sponsors in Saudi Arabia has developed a special hostility toward the Shiites. Saudi Shiite citizens in turn have long complained of discrimination in religious practice, government employment, and business, and overall marginalization.

For decades, opposition groups formed by Saudi Shiites, both leftist and Islamists, as well as hundreds of petitions by Shiite notables, have had the same demands: an end to sectarian discrimination in government employment and representation in main state sectors including at the ministerial level; more development in Shiite areas; the strengthening of the Shiite judiciary; and an end to arbitrary arrests of Shiite for religious or political reasons. None of these demands would significantly undermine the position of the royal family, or otherwise threaten the integrity of Saudi Arabia. They would rather cement the current political system and buy the allegiance of two million people living on top of the kingdom's oil.

Since 2011, the demands have also included the release or retrial of nine Shiite political prisoners and a withdrawal of Saudi forces from Bahrain, or at least a negotiated solution to the conflict there, as well as more general political reforms in Saudi Arabia. The government promised youth activists that their grievances would be addressed in April 2011, so following a call from senior Saudi Shiite clerics to halt protests, they did so. But the government did not follow through, and answered with repression over the summer, even though it released some prisoners that were arrested during the February to April 2011 protests. Therefore, the situation remained tense, and when four Shiites were shot dead in November 2011 their funerals turned into anti-government rallies with up to a 100,000 participants.

The perception of systematic discrimination has led some Saudi Shiites to embrace revolutionary ideologies over the decades. While pro-Iranian groups still exist amongst Gulf Shiites, they are not the most powerful amongst Saudi Shiites and had largely renounced violence as a political tool since at least the mid-1990s. But Saudi Arabia's repressive response to the protests and the zero-concessions policy are providing fertile breeding ground for future opposition groups. A repetition of post-1979 Shiite politics, when hundreds of young Shiites left Bahrain and Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province to become active in regional revolutionary movements, seems possible.

As the protests in Bahrain and particularly in Qatif receive only limited attention on Gulf-owned channels like Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, local Shiites are forced to watch the Iranian-sponsored Arabic-language Al Alam channel, Lebanese Hezbollah's Al Manar, Iraq's Ahlul Bait TV, or increasingly other pro-Assad channels to receive updates on the situation in their areas. The new cold war in the Middle East has turned into a fully-fledged media war, in which media outlets are either with the protests in Bahrain and Qatif and for Assad's regime, or with the protests in Syria and against the allegedly sectarian protests in Bahrain and Qatif.

The situation for Saudi Shiites in the Eastern Province is no secret. The U.S. State Department's Annual Report to Congress on International Religious Freedom for the second half of 2010, the period immediately predating the Arab Spring, records arbitrary detentions, mosque closures, and the arrest of Shiite worshippers. U.S. diplomatic cables released by Wikileaks revealed that U.S. diplomats, and particularly the staff at its consulate in Dhahran, have an incredible amount of information on the local Shiite communities and seem almost obsessed with grievances they deem legitimate. But the specific problems of the Saudi Shiites almost never come up at high-level meetings with Saudi officials.

This is not only due to the close Saudi and U.S. alliance. Americans sometimes share the suspicion of the Gulf Shiites, which permeates some of its allied regimes. This suspicion is partly to do with Iran, but also has its roots in the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers, which killed 19 U.S. servicemen. Nine Shiite prisoners have been incarcerated since 1996 for their alleged membership in Hezbollah al-Hijaz and their involvement in the bombings. They were indicted in the United States in 2001, but as U.S. foreign policy priorities changed after September 11 they became "forgotten," the name they are known by amongst Saudi Shiites. The indictment hints at the involvement of Lebanese Hezbollah and Iran but no evidence has ever been made public. At the time some Americans called for retaliation against Iran as a response to this bombing. But after September 11, fingers began to point toward al Qaeda as involved in the attack, raising questions about the guilt of these prisoners.

The secrecy surrounding this issue has contributed to mistrust toward the state and suspicion on parts of family members of the detained and the wider Saudi Shiite communities. Saudi Shiite protesters this year have adopted the cause of the nine prisoners. Their pictures were held up at rallies demanding their release, where their family members played a significant role. They were the Shiite counterparts of a simultaneous protest campaign in front of the ministry of interior in Riyadh by family members of political prisoners arrested on suspicion of membership in al Qaeda. But contrary to those prisoners, the Shiite prisoners cannot hope ever to be "rehabilitated" in one of the government's much advertised de-radicalization programs. It seems to be justified to at least ask for a public trial, a move repeatedly endorsed by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. But such a trial does not appear to be on the foreign-policy agenda of the United States.

The behavior of the Saudi leadership only allows the conclusion that repression of the Shiites is a fundamental part of Saudi political legitimacy. The state does not want to change the position of the Shiites and Shiite protests are used by the state to frighten the Sunni population of an Iranian takeover of the oilfields with the help of local Shiites. Similar narratives have been propagated in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) media for months, at the cost of further deepening the sectarian divide in the Gulf States. The GCC intervention in Bahrain has severely worsened sectarian relations in the Gulf and beyond to levels not seen since the Iranian Revolution. But this open Saudi sectarianism has already had negative repercussions in Iraq, as well as in Syria, Lebanon, and Kuwait. Bahrain looks set for years of sectarian conflict, community relations have broken down completely, and the state is conducting a campaign of what Shiite activists call "ethnic cleansing." Rather than completely alienating the Shiites, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain should negotiate a social contract with them. Failing to do so will lead to years of instability with uncertain outcomes. And it is far from certain that other Saudis will not be encouraged by the Shiite protests, as a recent statement by liberal Saudis from all over the kingdom denouncing the crackdown in Qatif has shown.

The West should press its allies, above all Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, to stop simply shooting and arresting their Shiite citizens and brandishing them as Iranian agents and traitors. The alienation of Shiite youth foments a perfect breeding ground for a new Gulf Shiite opposition movement and plays into the hands of the Iranian regime. Even without external help for the local Shiite protesters, the area looks ripe for a return to the tense sectarian politics of the 1980s. The United States should in its own, and in the Gulf States', interest push for a real reconciliation between the Shiites of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and their governments. Otherwise, sectarianism will come to dominate the Gulf, to the detriment of all.

Toby Matthiesen is a research fellow in Islamic and Middle Eastern studies at the University of Cambridge.

Why Won't Saudi Arabia Write Down its Laws?

By Nathan Brown, January 23, 2012

In 2007 and 2009 Saudi King Abdullah capped a decade of legal and judicial reforms in his country by reorganizing the judiciary and ordering that Saudi Arabia follow the step that virtually all other states in the region did long ago by codifying its laws — committing to paper a comprehensive compendium of the operative laws in the kingdom. Since that date, however, his order has been neither challenged nor implemented. Why is codification of law seen as such a dramatic step in Saudi Arabia? And why does the king seem incapable of making it happen?

Saudi kings devoted considerable attention in the first decade of the 21st century to remaking the judicial order. Initial steps taken were new procedure laws with new decrees insisting (with uncertain effectiveness) that courts follow prescribed rules in their operation — and making the courts, always ambivalent about the role of lawyers, friendlier to the legal profession. In the most recent moves, besides ordering codification, the king consolidated all sorts of quasi-judicial bodies that littered the legal framework of the kingdom, wrenched adjudication functions away from the Supreme Judicial Council (handing them to a newly created Supreme Court), and relieved the country's highest-ranking judge, a pillar of the old order, from his office at the head of the system. The king's steps were sufficiently dramatic — and the identity of the Saudi state so deeply enmeshed in claims to be fully Islamic, especially in its legal structure — that longtime Saudi legal scholar Frank E. Vogel, in "Saudi Arabia: Public, Civil, and Individual Shari`a in Law and Politics," termed them "not a shot but a barrage across the bow of his partners in rule, the conservative religious establishment" and "clearly seismic events within the world of Saudi shari`a politics."

Saudi Arabia is a difficult place to understand, and its legal system is especially unusual — not so much because it is opaque but much more because it is sui generis. When the country has structures similar to those of neighboring countries, it uses a different word — what "administrative courts" are called or even the word used for "law." And just as confusing is that on those occasions when the same word or term is used, the similarity in language masks deep differences in structure and meaning. (For instance, most Arab states have a body called a "Supreme Judicial Council" to oversee judicial affairs and administer the judicial sector — and often to subordinate the judiciary to the executive branch. In Saudi Arabia, a body by the same name served often to resist executive pressure and not only to oversee judicial affairs but until quite recently served as a supreme appellate court.)

The sorts of political experiences other Arab countries passed through — imperialism, ambitious state building, socialism, and liberalization — did not affect Saudi Arabia so deeply. Most other Arab legal systems are roughly homologous, so that a Moroccan lawyer could find his or her way around a Syrian legal dispute with relatively little difficulty. With a few exceptions the legal orders of Arab states are essentially civil law systems that would be more familiar to a lawyer trained in current-day Paris or Rome than

one trained in a medieval madrasa. In most Arab states, Islamic legal influence is strong in some areas (in marriage, divorce, and inheritance most especially), but judges rule largely on the basis of legislated texts and codes, and court systems are structured like (and courtrooms even have a similar physical appearance to) those on the European continent. Institutions associated more directly with Islamic law — such as courts that operated primarily on the basis of sharia or schools that taught Islamic jurisprudence — were generally initially left alone by centralizing states that built their own courts, issued their own laws, and built their own schools alongside the older, more Islamically-inclined structures. Gradually the sphere of the older Islamic structures was restricted until there was little fuss when the state finally took them over, sometimes folding their work into the state courts, codifying the remaining areas of law so that judges ruled on legislated texts rather than their understanding of Islamic law, and regulating curricula.

In Saudi Arabia, by contrast, sharia courts still have general jurisdiction. Judges rule on the basis of their understanding of the relevant rules in the Islamic legal tradition. While there are many tomes on Islamic jurisprudence, there is no place where rules are written in any authoritative or binding form. Instead the individual judge uses years of training to master the jurisprudence developed from the text of the Quran, and the practices of the prophet and the early community, to apply that understanding to the case at hand.

The king does make some rules, of course, to administer the affairs of the community — as even very conservative Islamic legal authorities acknowledge is his duty. But the Saudis studiously avoid words used elsewhere in the Arab world for law, *qanun*, since it suggests that human words rather than divine ones lay at the basis of the legal order. Instead the word *nizam* (system) refers to the most wide ranging royal commands. There are also a range of lesser decrees and ordinances. None of these rules may contravene the sharia and judges simply disregard them if they think that they do. Universities that teach Islamic law have often simply ignored the state-issued laws rather than include them in a religiously-dominated curriculum. Sometimes Islamic legal scholars refer to areas covered by such edicts as those that are beneath the dignity of the sharia.

In large areas of law in which the state wishes to have a bit more control than the decentralized and autonomous sharia based system allows, Saudi kings have used their undisputed authority to structure the judiciary to form a number of bodies that oversee specific sorts of problems. The most significant is an administrative law structure given the rather non-legal name *diwan al-mazalim* (often translated as Board of Grievances). Other quasi-judicial tribunals have been formed over the years for labor or investment disputes.

Most modern states are, above all, law-making machines. That is how they mobilize and allocate resources; make and enforce decisions; and render behavior, transactions, and even speech obligatory, permissible, or forbidden. Making law is a critical attribute of sovereignty. And that is precisely the concern in Saudi Arabia, a polity that takes divine sovereignty quite seriously. Law is to be made in accordance with God's will.

So why is codification of laws — merely writing down what the laws are — seen as a repugnant steps by many (though not all) of the kingdom's most powerful religious scholars? The opposition shows some signs of waning, but it has still been sufficient to prevent any practical steps toward codification.

First, there is a basic problem with the term "codification" of the sharia itself — the term used (*taqnin al-sharia*) might quite literally be translated as "rendering God's law into man-made legislation," an almost sacrilegious concept. Some codification advocates have therefore preferred the term *tadwin,* which has the same denotation without the etymological baggage.

However, far more than vocabulary is at issue. Saudi religious scholars note that previous generations of Muslim legal experts saw no need for codification and see no reason for the change. But even more, they look quite disapprovingly at what the codification has meant in neighboring states — it has generally been European (often French) law that has been brought in by centralizing states interested in systematizing their legal systems. In some cases, European law was introduced directly and other times indirectly through its Egyptian offshoot (Egypt did not convert over to an adapted civil law system until the 19th century).

Advocates of codification protest that despite what transpired in other countries, in Saudi Arabia it need not imply Europeanization. Codes could be written in the basis of Islamic jurisprudence. There have been some attempts by Islamic legal scholars (and occasionally by governments in the Muslim world) to write down sharia-based rules in the form of comprehensive law codes, though their impact in general has not been great.

The most influential religious scholars in Saudi Arabia would object even to such an attempt to codify Islamic legal principles. It is not so much writing them down that would bother them; it is obliging the individual judge to follow those texts. The binding nature of codes, not their written nature, provokes the strongest objections. The reasons are closely connected with their view of what a judge is and how the Islamic legal tradition sustains itself over the generations.

In the sharia courts of Saudi Arabia, judges rule on the basis of their own training and knowledge of jurisprudence. Religious scholars feel they should not be bound by whatever rulers have decreed to be the authoritative version of that tradition. While judges might look to various sources for guidance, no one person has final authority. Each judge should have direct and unmediated access to the sources of law and the full range of jurisprudential debates rather than to have them redacted and imposed by a person or committee, no matter how powerful or learned.

Of course, judges are not set free to rule as they wish armed only with a copy of the Quran. They emerge after being trained in a jurisprudential tradition over a millennium old. A civil law lawyer masters codes and legislated texts. A common law lawyer studies court decisions in order to understand how various legal principles and texts are applied in practice. For a classical Islamic legal training, the key texts are, of course, the Quran and those that describe the practice of the prophet and the early community. Also important is the scholarly finding of law (the *fatwa*) as a means for guiding application of legal principles. No legislator's edicts can trump the will of the Almighty. No fallible court trapped in the circumstances of a particular case can bind its successors. It is jurisprudential scholarship, not legislative texts or judicial precedents that transmits legal norms across the generations. This explains not only the reluctance of Saudi judges to follow codes but also the lackadaisical manner in which judgments are published — in a system in which court precedent plays no formal role, there is less of an impetus to have the texts of judgments available to parties other than those directly involved.

Judges are educated in this body of Islamic legal scholarship — though again, they are not told which rule they must apply in a particular case or how it is to be applied. Early in its history, the Islamic legal tradition developed into schools of law within which followers were trained. The Wahhabi tradition, it should be noted, for all its international reputation for rigidity, is actually less deferential to past authority than other approaches and more insistent that the individual judge be set free to rule in accordance with his own understanding of the appropriate application of legal norms.

Judges I have met elsewhere in the Arab world have a very strong sense that they represent impartial justice and, in a very real sense, the authority of the state. They often deeply resent having that authority bent to the will of the executive branch (though they recognize that often happens). In Saudi Arabia, judges see themselves as acting in accordance with the will of an even higher authority.

No Saudi king would ever question these ideas in theory — but several have chafed at the results. In a sense, the argument is less about what Islamic law is than about who can speak in its name. In most other Arab states Islamic law, to the extent that it is operative, becomes so after being recognized and often codified by political authorities. There are a few areas of uncodified law in a few countries, but those islands have become quite rare. Yet they are the norm in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi kings would not make so ambitious a claim as to be able to speak for Islamic law, but they have striven intermittently to have scholars sit down and agree on what it is — and to record their agreement in written form of a code to guide the work of courts. But they have still failed.

Two decades ago, the Hay'at Kubar al-`Ulama (Body of Senior Religious Scholars) finally reported its response to a longstanding request from the king for an opinion on codification. By a narrow majority they rejected the idea. The arguments' reasons in responses

of hay'at kubar al `ulama are reported very carefully in Muhammad Bin `Abd Allah Bin Muhammad al-Marzuqi, Sultat Wali al-Amr fi Taqayyud Sultat al-Qadi. But rather than take no for a permanent answer, King Abdullah pressed again and finally ordered codification to begin in 2007.

In Saudi Arabia, rulers have been willing to cede the main work of drafting to religious scholars; it is not necessarily ambitious centralization that they are after. Instead, three sets of concern seem to have motivated the push for codification. First, litigants are often pushed outside of the courts to resolve their disputes, where they have a greater degree of knowledge about the governing law. Alternatives — such as arbitration or resorting to foreign courts — vary according to the nature of the dispute.

Second, the Saudi state has been driven to create a series of ad hoc structures to govern areas where it has a more definite set of rules it wants to see implemented. But those quasi-judicial bodies do not have the full prestige, status, and autonomy of a court. They are bodies often staffed by people with administrative rather than judicial backgrounds. In some areas it is even possible that those involved in adjudication could be officials of the body that is involved in a dispute.

Finally, the Saudi state has had to live with uncertainty, as have potential litigants. It is not clear which of its non-sharia based laws will be regarded as legitimate and enforced by which judges.

These concerns have grown in recent years as Saudi Arabia has become far more connected to international commerce and finance — and its ambitions in this regard seem currently unbounded. While there is a lively Islamic financial sector, for instance, much banking must take place outside the framework of the regular court system and has to make do with international mechanisms as well as a dispute resolution body attached to the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority. To engage in international trade and financial transactions in a country where it is not clear what contracts and rules the courts will enforce is less than ideal.

Therein lies King Abdullah's decisiveness. His order to begin preparing codes was still respectful of the judiciary — laws would be drawn from Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic legal scholars would likely oversee the process. Many scholars are convinced that the king is right, noting that most judges are probably not sufficiently knowledgeable to develop interpretations of Islamic law entirely on their own. Codification might thus be a way of enforcing sharia-based rules rather than avoiding them. It might even bring back under their jurisdiction matters that had been transferred to quasi-judicial bodies.

But nothing definitive has happened. In a recent visit to Riyadh I asked a top legal official very supportive of codification whether a committee has been formed or any work has been done. He said he knew of nothing (and likely would be in a position to know). In a recent public event, an official from the ministry of justice was pressed about a personal status code developed jointly by Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states (so their laws would be harmonious in that area). He said his ministry would do whatever it was told but that the matter was in the hands of religious scholars who are supposed to be studying it. But if they are doing so, it is a silent process.

The sweeping processes of political change unleashed elsewhere in the region may actually have taken the wind out of the sails of current Saudi Arabian judicial reform efforts. Like many promises made in the past — for a consultative assembly, for instance — codification will probably happen, but it may take decades more.

Nathan J. Brown is a professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University and nonresident senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The Identity Politics of Kuwait's Election

By Gwenn Okruhlik, February 8, 2012

The parliamentary elections on February 2 in Kuwait reflected the intense drama unfolding in the country — youth-led street protests, corruption charges that implicated 13 members of parliament (MPs), the November 2011 storming of the parliament to protest corruption, the dissolution of parliament by the emir, and the resignation of the embattled prime minister. The election campaign was marked by vitriolic rhetoric and violence. And the results empowered a loose Islamist-tribal coalition of opposition candidates which disappointed liberals and set the stage for continued political fireworks. Despondent moderates surveying the outcome repeatedly complained that, "nobody is representing the middle."

The election revolved around competition between a coalition of opposition candidates demanding greater transparency and candidates who have been loyal to the government. Important political issues loom large in the background in Kuwait — things like an elected prime minister, allowance of genuine political parties, an independent judiciary, parliamentary independence from the government, and general progress toward a constitutional democracy. However, demographic changes and the material issues of welfare and corruption seem to have driven the election results — particularly fury over evidence of official corruption and the absence of accountability. This resulted in a 54 percent turnover in the parliament.

The loose Islamist-tribal coalition of opposition candidates won about 34 seats in the 50-seat parliament. Islamist candidates won 14 seats, while tribal candidates, half of whom might be called Islamist, took 21 seats. The opposition group is clearly tapping into voter sentiment. Tribal opposition MP Musallam al Barrak from the Fourth District was elected with the highest number of votes ever cast for a candidate.

At the same time, the so-called Islamist-led opposition is far from a monolithic coalition. Some Islamists are ideologues; others are not. Religious fervor was not a central campaign call. Islamist candidates proved themselves to be better organized and more politically savvy, articulate, and eloquent. Many younger candidates have risen through social organizations and civil society. They have been "groomed" to be effective leaders over the years. Nor are tribal voters a monolithic bloc. There is an emerging generational divide among tribal voters as many tribal MPs were implicated in the corruption scandal. Interestingly, the controversial tribal primaries were not an accurate predictor of the tribal vote in the general election.

Liberals fared poorly, however. None of the four women MPs elected in the last parliament won seats; in fact, not one of the 23 female candidates was elected. Liberals saw their seats reduced from eight to five, and Shiite from nine to seven. Shiite MPs have generally voted pro-government. Further, the Shiite MPs include five supported by the Shiite institutions while only two identify as liberal and nationalist. There are only four independents. Columnist and former Minister of Information Sami al Nesf called the election results "a tsunami of wrath and fury against governmental and legislative corruption...and against moderate voices." Columnist Waleed al Rujaib saw it as a "clear manifestation of tribal and sectarian sentiments and a continuation of corruption in our society." But for their own part, the relatively small liberal contingent is divided and does not work together in any coherent way. One liberal voter summed the electoral outcome this way, "We deserved this! We allowed this to happen."

There is real frustration, even anger, among Kuwaiti voters about the state of the economy and development projects. In my small poll among female voters in the Third District, they voiced concrete concerns about the lack of jobs for Kuwaiti youth, the lack of housing for single and divorced women, the absence of nurses in grade schools throughout Kuwait, and that Kuwait has fallen far behind the economic powerhouses of Dubai and Doha, even behind Saudi Arabia which has burgeoning new economic cities. They also complained of too much *wasta*, the rise of sectarian tension, and the uneven implementation of the constitution. For example, "The constitution is not the problem. It's the way they pick and choose what to implement."

The most powerful force driving the success of the opposition appears to have been widespread anger at official corruption. That rage will permeate the new parliament's political agenda. The penal code stipulates that those involved in corruption should not be allowed to occupy public office, a law that opposition figures are now using to challenge some of the election results. At least 14 voters have filed an appeal to demand the annulment of the election of Mohammad al Juwaihel, who was charged with corruption. Law professor and newly-elected MP from the Fourth District, Obaid Al Wasmi, spoke in alarming tones, "I swear by the Almighty God that I will be scrutinizing the files of all those corrupt...I say to you that you have 24 hours to leave the country, I would not advise you to stay."

For some, the electoral results are not the issue. Political science professor at Kuwait University Ghanim al Najjar said before the elections, "It does not matter who win or loses. What is important is how we move on from there." And here, many worry about the rising trend of sectarian agitation, derogatory, anti-tribal rhetoric, sexist discourse, and violent clashes among competing camps.

Some liberals do fear the Islamists will "turn Kuwait into Saudi Arabia." Upon his election, MP Mohammed Al Haif announced that, "The ground is now fertile to amend the second article of the constitution to facilitate the road to change making *sharia* the sole source of legislation in Kuwait." The simple revision of one article — changing "a" to "the" — alters the legal framework of the state of Kuwait. An official spokesperson soon countered that the government will not stand idle in the face of such efforts. Women, in particular, fear the imposition of dress codes and increased gender segregation. Two winners, MP Mohammed Hayef and MP Faisal Al Mislem, had, in fact, previously formed a Committee to Curtail the Negative Phenomena at Kuwait University. They set limits on women's dress and integration on campus. They also targeted feminine men and masculine women. But others point out that Islamists have long competed in Kuwaiti elections and been represented in parliament, and are unlikely to behave in fundamentally different ways today than in the past.

The greater fears lie in the backlash against the rising salience of tribal voters. Many liberals view the tribes as something other than civil citizens. It is reported that before the election, some tribes convened in front of parliament and sang traditional war songs for its

dissolution. There is a sense that a "tribal mentality" is growing and that it will destroy the institutions of civil society as tribal MPs lack any platform of national development. Instead, they seek material incentives and patronage — higher salaries, more contracts, and the erasure of private debt. They will take the law into their hands and defend their tribal MPs, right or wrong. This is said to be their breaking point with the Islamists. One person said, "At least the Islamist positions are based on rational thinking, even if I disagree with it."

In some ways, the Kuwaiti government brought the "tribal" problem on itself. In the 1960 and 1970s, when the government was fighting against the liberals and nationalists, they brought in an estimated 200,000 tribal people from Saudi Arabia and gave them Kuwaiti citizenship. As one person explained, "They were given huge parcels out [in] the suburbs. There was no mingling or assimilation so the new *bedu* formed neighborhoods in isolation from larger Kuwaiti society." The strategy has backfired. The government has lost their loyalty and their vote. Tribes are now the largest bloc in the opposition. The government still retains the enormous welfare costs of the "new *bedu*" and their many offspring. The tribes do indeed agitate for more material benefits from the state — which they consider only their fair share vis a vis the hadhar.

In a similar way, entire neighborhoods were constructed of only Shiite citizens. An elderly voter bemoaned, "What is all this Sunni-Shi'a talk? I never heard this growing up. There is no difference. We are all Muslim." Another supported her saying, "In the past, Shi'a and Sunni lived together. It was good. People try to make this division now." These incidents must be coupled with the volatile anti-new bedu rhetoric of Al Juweihel and the ensuing mob violence. And that unfortunately, exists alongside heightened sectarian tensions that overlap the *bedu/hadhar* tensions as the Shiite community is primarily urbanized. Taken together, it appears that socio-political discourse in Kuwait has grown more strident.

One potential source of conflict in the early days will come over the place of Islam. The Popular Bloc announced that it would support the move to amend the Kuwaiti Constitution so that Islam is the sole source of legislation. This move, strongly opposed by liberals and the ruling family, requires two-thirds of the assembly to approve it as well as the approval of the emir. It is unlikely to pass at this juncture but the debate will reveal much about the internal dynamics of coalitions.

While this sounds alarming, it is worth recalling that Kuwait has a long experience with parliamentary politics, a vibrant civil society, and a robust political discussion that is open when compared with its GCC neighbors. Still, the repeated elections force actors to expend tremendous resources, time, and intellectual energy on campaigns that might be better spent tackling concrete issues of political accountability and national economic development.

Gwenn Okruhlik is a Brookings Doha fellow/Qatar University. *She would like to thank Nathan Brown, Kristen Diwan, Lindsey Stephenson, and Mary Ann Tetreault for their valuable comments.*

Ahistorical Sectarianism in Kuwait

By Lindsey Stephenson, April 29, 2011

Sectarian violence in Bahrain has led many to nervously speculate about the potential for these events to set rapidly into motion a downward spiral of Sunni-Shiite relations in the rest of the Gulf, and the catastrophe that could arise should the violence pit the regional religious rhetorical powers of Saudi Arabia and Iran against each other. One vital question is how much weight will the turmoil in Bahrain have over other Shiite communities in the Gulf, namely the large Shiite population in Kuwait, perhaps the United State's strongest regional ally and strategic partner in the region?

Fortunately, in Kuwait sectarianism has always been a non-starter. Though aware of sectarian differences, these were never highly politicized. The Shiites in Kuwait have been an integral part of society since before there was even a polity to speak of. They make up roughly one half of the country's merchant class, and around 30 percent of the population. Unlike in Bahrain, the Shiites hold high government positions and nine of Kuwait's 50 elected members of parliament are Shiites. Although some neighborhoods are becoming more homogenously Shiite, contrary to the situation in Bahrain, the vast majority of Sunnis and Shiites live beside each other — and have for decades as houses generally stay within families. Simply put, the Shiites are fully Kuwaiti, and have long been regarded as such by the government and Kuwaiti Sunnis. And yet, events in Bahrain have provided fuel for those in Kuwait who wish to make waves.

The open Kuwaiti media has proven to be an incessant instigator of sectarianism and a forum for outlandish comments that were previously only said in private and often written off as nonsense. Bahraini government as well as predominately Shiite news channels have also been influential in stoking the flames. Kuwaiti Sunnis and Shiites alike have commented that once the TV is on, there is no escaping sectarian discussions (indeed, many TVs these days sit muted in the background). The state of Kuwaiti newspapers is similar.

There are two issues for which talking heads have raised unfounded questions: namely Shiite origins and loyalty. Polemical comments about "weird things Shiites do" have played into deliberate othering tactics in efforts to drive a wedge between Sunni and Shiite communities, and have unfortunately been picked up by the masses. Setting aside the historical fact that many Kuwaitis of Arab origin are Shiites and Kuwaitis of Persian origin are Sunnis, many programs are propagating an idea that Shiites have Iranian origins and are thus an alien presence. This has seeped into common rhetoric and fostered suspicion amongst some Sunnis that they don't really know who their neighbors are anymore. One Sunni woman from a merchant family explained that, "In school we used to know all of our classmates. Now their are lots of families who say they are Kuwaiti, but we don't know them." Initially thinking she was speaking about Bedouins, I asked if that was who she meant. "I don't know," she said. "They're from Iran, these kinds of places."

Furthermore, the notion of Shiite religious authority being centered in Iran (although many Kuwaiti Shiites are followers of Ali al-Sistani, the senior Shiite cleric in Iraq) has conveniently lent itself to polemics which aim to demonstrate that the loyalty of Kuwaiti Shiites is first to Ayatollah Khamenei in Iran and second to Kuwait. Shiites, however, are under no false assumptions about Persian affinity for Arabs. One Kuwaiti woman who lived in Qom for many years while her husband was in seminary school put it very plainly: "Iranians hate Arabs. I only go back for pilgrimage." Many other Kuwaiti Shiites echoed her comments. Much of Iranian animosity toward Arabs stems from the long war with Iraq in the 1980s, but it seems that Kuwaitis have carved out a unique impression. In colloquial Farsi, the word "Kuwait" has become an adjective describing something "requiring very little effort." In essence, Iran is not a place where Kuwaiti Shiites feel particularly welcome (although some do make short vacation trips during the summer). Iran may be home to important sites of religious pilgrimage, and distant relatives, but it is not a country to which they feel any particular political loyalty.

The issue of loyalty to Kuwait is particularly pertinent as the Gulf War is still very fresh on the minds of Kuwaitis, and stories of the families who aided Saddam are widely circulated. Ironically the group whose loyalty was most in question during that time, those of Bedouin origins, are the very ones at the forefront of the accusations about Shiite loyalty. Sunni merchant families, having built the Kuwaiti state alongside the Shiites, are less willing to buy this rhetoric, but ideas about the "strangeness" of Shiite practices is increasingly prevalent.

Anti-Shiite sentiment has come at a particularly delicate time for the Shiites in Kuwaiti national politics, as they must juggle their relations with the populous and the government, who are at odds. The ruling family, with whom they have a very good relationship, continues to front a very unpopular prime minister, leading to countless stalemates within parliament. Although Shiite MPs are now in solidarity with those who wish to oust the "corrupt" prime minister, the initial reluctance of some to do so (and potentially jeopardize relations with the ruling family) was identified as proof that the Shiites do not really want what is best for Kuwait.

This othering and at least rhetorical marginalization is obviously not very helpful, and in many ways is a problem because it could become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If the Shiites are made to feel separate from the rest of society, the community will inevitably become more insular and particularistic. Already insignia of Shiite identity are on the rise, such as the wearing of a particular kind of ring. Sunnis are keenly aware of these expressions of Shiite identity, particularly since some of them — such as car decals bearing the names of the Prophet's family in a font mimicking dripping blood — are found offensive. One woman from an urbanized Bedouin family was keen to note this change in attitude. "When my father was young, he lived in Bayan. There are so many Shiites in Bayan, but there were no problems between them. At that time everyone was just Kuwaiti, no one displayed their differences."

Some Shiites have discouraged these practices that distinguish them from the Sunnis, especially in the wake of the current tensions. Others however are less concerned and remain confident that their strong position in business and politics will protect them. Indeed the ruling family and Kuwaiti government has reassured the Shiites of their respected position, both by sending a delegation of Shiite officials to Bahrain in attempts to arbitrate (which was turned down by the Bahraini government), and by refusing to send any Kuwaiti troops in the GCC coalition to intervene in the situation. The information minister however, did take legal action against *Al-Dar* newspaper, which labeled the GCC intervention a "Saudi invasion" into Bahrain, stating that, "The government will never let any extremist from the opposite ends of the spectrum to achieve a political gain at a cost to the national unity."

This line has been a fairly consistent theme from the Kuwaiti government in recent years, whose regional security strategy is (quite necessarily) a practical one. In a closed meeting in 2008, a high-ranking MP explained that Kuwait cannot take a hard-line position against Iranian nuclear ambitions because, "They are our neighbors, they always have been neighbors and they always will be neighbors." Being a small country wedged in between two powerful and often at odds neighbors, Kuwait certainly has a vested interest in keeping the neighborhood peace and moderating polemical rhetoric.

Kuwait's open society and political system does have the capability to absorb this potential crisis, and will likely do so. Shiite presence in society and their relatively equal access on an institutional level educationally, professionally, and politically does not afford any Kuwaiti a context devoid of members of the other sect. This helps to maintain an integrated society in which people know one another and are thus less likely to vilify members of the other group. However, a continuation if the sectarian polemics could translate into more discriminatory hiring practices and a breakdown of this integration essential to sectarian harmony.

Kuwait will not become Bahrain in terms of outright violence, but if media in Kuwait continues to draw lines in the sand between the sects, these lines could very well become perforations over time, and perhaps more quickly if tensions in Bahrain continue to escalate. For a country located between the poles of Sunni and Shiite Islam, a weakening of Kuwaiti national unity could translate into unwanted meddling and a loss of autonomy for the whole.

Lindsey Stephenson is an M.A. student at the Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Cultures and was a Fulbright fellow in Kuwait in 2007-2008.

Kuwati's Youth Movement

By Kristin Diwan, June 29, 2011

On June 23, 2011, Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammed al-Sabah survived a parliament vote of no confidence, the third opposition bid to oust him. Yet with another parliamentary challenge already in the works, Kuwait's contentious politics are far from contained and have even spread beyond the walls of parliament. Earlier in the month, a rally of several thousand was held in Kuwait City demanding the prime minister's dismissal. This was not an exceptional event, but rather the latest maneuver by a new force: youth movements taking to the streets to force a change in Kuwaiti politics.

The Kuwaiti youth share many characteristics with the region's broader protest movements. Their chief complaint is corruption, the "political money" that, in their view, distorts the emirate's governing institutions and threatens its constitutional order. Like the youth in Tunis and Cairo, they are working toward a more civic order, grounded in constitutional rights and realized through citizen activism. Yet while clearly in harmony with the uprisings across the Arab world, the movement predates them and is driven by developments in Kuwaiti politics and society which have brought the historically dynamic emirate to its current malaise.

The protesters are seeking unity at a time when Kuwait is wracked by division. Three confrontations predominate: a leadership competition within the ruling family; a constitutional showdown between the parliament and the ruling cabinet; and a class struggle between state-dependent civil servants and the commercial elite. The interaction among these leadership, constitutional, and class struggles — played out in the context of a historic oil boom and financial bust — has raised political tensions to the boiling point.

The dysfunction in Kuwait's political system begins at the top with the ruling Al-Sabah. The problems within the monarchy became apparent in the 2005 succession when a standoff between two branches of the ruling family over the replacement for the incapacitated Crown Prince Saad Abdullah provided an opening for the opportunistic parliament to step in and depose him. The ultimate resolution of this intra-family power struggle came down squarely in favor of one branch of the royal family, which now holds all important posts save one. Nonetheless, this consolidation removed the balance between the two branches, and — significantly — moved the succession debate on to the next generation.

The competition among these future claimants to the throne has intensified with ill effects. First, the endemic leadership struggles have paralyzed the executive branch of government and seeded corruption through the bureaucracy, imperiling Kuwait's future development. Second, the rivals have used members of the national assembly as proxies, encouraging parliamentary challenges to weaken the other's position within the cabinet. The competition between the prime minister and Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmed al-Fahad reached unprecedented levels earlier in June 2011 when parliamentarians loyal to Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammed withdrew their support from Sheikh Ahmed over a parliamentary grilling, forcing him to resign.

The open political warfare of ruling family members shocked a Kuwaiti public inured to government instability. The five years of Nasser al-Mohammed's leadership have seen 11 parliamentary interpolations, forcing six resignations of the cabinet and the dissolution and early election of parliament three times. While the political opponents of Sheikh Nasser are convinced of his ineffectiveness and political corruption, at heart there is a deeper ambition: to advance Kuwait's constitutional monarchy. Having already forced the concession of separating the prime minister position from the office of the crown prince, the opposition seeks to establish the principle that the prime minister can be dismissed by parliament. The removal of a royal prime minister by popular action is an important step toward an elected prime minister and a genuine parliamentary monarchy.

The ability of the parliament to advance this objective, however, has been compromised due to their own internal divisions. The liberal versus Islamist competition that dominated the first decade of the reinstated parliament after Kuwait's liberation remains, but it has been eclipsed by other social divisions. Prominent among them are urban-tribal tensions whose cultural character masks a strong class component as the late-arriving tribes, more dependent on state employment and subsidies, challenge the urban commercial elite. Sectarian tensions between Sunni and Shiite have escalated sharply, certainly over regional issues — Bahrain chief among them, but also due to the prime minister's reliance on the urban Shiite vote to maintain his majority and his premiership.

Kuwait's youth movement arose in response to this weakening of political institutions, both royal and parliamentary. In the face of this political dysfunction and in reaction to a creeping encroachment on civil liberties, they offer a straightforward message to the prime minister — leave. Youth activists have been criticized for the simplicity of their message and street tactics. Yet prominent activists in the movement describe this as a necessary first step. Political change requires a cultural change — to convince Kuwaitis that protests are a right. It is this conviction that drives their insistence on choosing the location of their protests in the commercial center of Kuwait City, a site with a historical connection to constitutional struggles of the 1950s. The government has countered by limiting protests to a park in front of the national assembly where the first student protests, the successful campaign for electoral reform known as the Orange Movement, were held in 2006. The escalating tension between the defiant youth and the government is evident in the heavy police presence in the downtown Safat Square and in the emir's recent speech calling for order and the enforcement of the law.

In spite of their defiance, the youth movement cannot fully escape the political perils of Kuwait's redistributive order. There are persistent rumors of their links to competing elements of the ruling family — rumors sure to gain more traction as a dissident member of the Al-Sabah just voiced his support for the protesters and even for a popularly elected prime minister. Others see them as being led by the opposition in parliament. These attacks on their independence surfaced in a protest in late May 2011 when youth activists shouted down the populist Kuwaiti MP attending their rally, evidence that some in the movement are worried about the co-optation that they see as endemic to Kuwait's patronage-fed political system.

Their antidote to the "political money" that corrupts and divides Kuwaiti society is social solidarity. And the movement can indeed claim some success in bridging communities and drawing supporters from across the ideological divide. One former Muslim Brotherhood youth prominent in the movement spoke animatedly about his political transformation: "You can't just look at everyone as potential converts to your Islamic program; you have to work with all elements of society as they exist." Still, the protests of today contrast markedly with the coed rallies organized by the United States-educated activists of the Orange Movement. There has been a pronounced shift toward the middle class and tribal Kuwaitis. Overcoming these cultural and class divisions remains a challenge.

Organizational cohesion is also a problem for the youth movement. On the eve of their high profile March 8 rally which sought to capture momentum from the success of the Tunisian and Egyptian street activists, the movement fragmented into two and later three separate organizations, falling out over personalities and tactics. Still, as Kuwait confronts the weakening of all its organized political forces, from the ruling family to its political societies, the logic of re-formation is a powerful one. The emergence of the new Kuwaiti youth movements should be seen as something hopeful: evidence that a capacity for change — or at least the desire for it — still exists.

Kristin Smith Diwan is an assistant professor of comparative and regional studies at the American University School of International Service.

Chapter 9

SYRIA

Islamism and the Syrian uprising

By Nir Rosen, March 8, 2012

James Clapper, the United States Director of National Intelligence, warned in April of al Qaeda taking advantage of the growing conflict in Syria. The Syrian regime and its supporters frequently claim that the opposition is dominated by al Qaeda-linked extremists. Opposition supporters often counter that the uprising is completely secular. But months of reporting on the ground in Syria revealed that the truth is more complex.

Syria's uprising is not a secular one. Most participants are devout Muslims inspired by Islam. By virtue of Syria's demography most of the opposition is Sunni Muslim and often come from conservative areas. The death of the Arab left means religion has assumed a greater role in daily life throughout the Middle East. A minority is secular and another minority is comprised of ideological Islamists. The majority is made of religious-minded people with little ideology, like most Syrians. They are not fighting to defend secularism (nor is the regime) but they are also not fighting to establish a theocracy. But as the conflict grinds on, Islam is playing an increasing role in the uprising.

Mosques became central to Syria's demonstrations as early as March 2011 and influenced the uprising's trajectory, with religion becoming increasingly more important. Often activists described how they had "corrected themselves" after the uprising started. Martyrs became important to a generation that had only seen martyrs on television from Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon. "People got more religious," one activist in Damascus's Barzeh neighborhood explained, "they got closer to death, you could be a martyr so people who drank or went out at night corrected themselves." Some Arab satellite news stations have also contributed to the dominance of Islamists by interviewing more of them and focusing on them as opposed to more secular opposition figures or intellectuals. In Daraa activists complained that satellite networks were marginalizing prominent leftists.

Clerics were influential from the beginning in much of the country, but their authority is not absolute. Sheikhs have often played a positive role in the uprising, enforcing discipline and exhorting armed and unarmed activists to act responsibly. One reason why Homs has not descended into Bosnia-like sectarian massacres is because of the strong influence of opposition sheikhs.

"Sheikhs have a role," said a cleric active in the opposition in the cities of Hama and Latakia, "in an area where people are scared a sheikh in his sermon can encourage them to go out." As a result many sheikhs have been arrested while others have fled the country. Opposition supporters are also vocal when they disapprove of a sheikh's positions. In November 2011, in the Tadamun area of Damascus, a sheikh at the Ali ibn Abi Talib mosque condemned demonstrations and spoke about conspiracies in language resembling that of the government. A friend stood up in disgust in the middle of the sermon and walked out. Others followed him

spontaneously and began demonstrating. After five minutes security forces arrived and they all ran away. "It's forbidden to pray in front of him," my friend told me later that day, "either speak the truth or be quiet."

In the Damascus suburb of Arbeen, opposition leaders spoke sardonically of their local clerics. "The sheikhs here all belong to security and the Baath party," one leader there told me. "The sheikhs told us not to go out and not to watch the biased channels. We went out against the sheikhs, shouting down with this sheikh or that sheikh. There were no good sheikhs with the people here, either he was afraid or he was with the regime. The sheikhs described the youth as thugs." Revolutionaries threatened Sheikh Hassan Seyid Hassan, Arbeen's top cleric, saying they would break his car and burn his house and office. In a sermon he apologized for condemning the uprising.

One of the main causes for the first demonstrations in Arbeen was the demand for the release of 21 local young men arrested in 2006. The young men, and some were boys, had come under the influence of Salafi jihadist clerics and were blamed by the regime for an attempted attack on the state television headquarters. "Here the main reason we came out was to demand the release of our prisoners" one local leader said. "We are religious and that's why we are oppressed."

Near Harasta, in Duma, I met with Abu Musab, an insurgent commander. He claimed he had been fired from his job as an imam for "speaking the truth" and talking about dignity. The strict Hanbali school of Islam dominates Duma and not a single woman can be seen on its streets without her face fully concealed by a burqa. Piety was one of the reasons why Duma was so revolutionary, he told me. "A sheikh does not have to say fight Bashar," he said, "he can just refer to a chapter from the Quran and everybody will understand. Because they are religious they have more motivation and ethics." But he stressed that most people in Duma did not seek an Islamic state. According to Abu Musab, he supported an armed struggle against the regime from the first day and most others only did after Ramadan. He took me to a funeral for two martyrs of the revolution, one of them an armed fighter. As the crowd of hundreds left they chanted, "The people want a declaration of jihad!"

Many of the names chosen for Friday demonstrations are religious in connotation and many of the insurgent groups who misleadingly call themselves the Free Syrian Army have names that are particularly Sunni Muslim in nature. The insurgent groups' names are increasingly Islamic and even Salafi in their tone, such as the "Abu Dujana Battalion," the "Abu Ubeida Battalion," the "Muhajireen wal Ansar Battalion" and even a group named after Yazid, a divisive figure in Islamic history who is hated by Shiites but respected by hard line Sunnis (who do not like Shiites).

What about the Muslim Brotherhood (MB)? Syria saw MB inspired uprisings in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. In the 1980s a radical group that found the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (SMB) too moderate split off and called itself the Fighting Vanguard. They were responsible for much of the violence that was blamed on the Brotherhood that traumatizes Syrian society to this day, much as the regime's attack on Hama where the armed Muslim Brothers concentrated also left permanent scars that have been reopened in the last year. SMB members fled into exile and remained active in the opposition, which also led them to dominate the Syrian National Council (SNC). During the administration of President George W. Bush the United States reached out to the SMB in order to undermine the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Within the SNC, the SMB is behaving in a very authoritarian fashion and is facing growing criticism from both secular and Islamist opposition. The divides in the SNC are not Islamist versus secular. The secularist SNC President Burhan Ghalioun walks with the SMB. Other Islamists like the Imad al Din al Rashid's Syrian National Movement are hostile to the SMB.

The regime has sought to conflate the opposition with the SMB of the 1980s, knowing that if it succeeds it can legitimize dealing with them with violence but if it fights them on the political front it will lose. "The ideology of the Muslim Brothers has remained quite influential in Syria, but as an organization, they completely ceased to exist inside the country in the early 1980s," Thomas Pierret, a lecturer in contemporary Islam at the University of Edinburgh, said. "A proof of that is that the Islamist cells dismantled by the authorities over the last decades were linked to the Islamic Liberation Party or to Jihadi networks, but never to the Muslim Brothers." In reality popular mobilization does not require the orders of the SMB, but for some in the opposition the uprising is revenge for the 1980s

and the SMB is indeed playing a role. Most Syrian supporters of the opposition associate the 1980s with a time of draconian regime repression and collective punishment while regime supporters and minorities associate it with sectarian violence and terrorism.

In January, I spoke with a knowledgeable official from a different national branch of the MB who was based in Beirut. "The revolution in Syria today has nothing to do with the MB of the 1980s," he said, but he told me that the SMB was involved in the current uprising. Individual members of the SMB played a role organizing the uprising in Homs, Hama, and in the coastal areas, he said. The SMB and its Lebanese branch, the Jamaa Islamiya, were sending money and aid via Tripoli in Lebanon. They were also hosting families fleeing from Syria, providing them with food, clothing and shelter while sending aid to their relatives left behind in Syria. "The Jamaa Islamiya has a very clear loud position on Syria," he said, "they are against the regime and supporting revolution. And the Brotherhood does not just support with words. It might be money and it might be some tools and facilitation. And if the Lebanese Brotherhood is doing it, it is with the cooperation of the Brotherhood of Syria." The Jamaa Islamiya was playing a role via the SMB, he explained. "The Brotherhood shares the same school of thinking of Hassan al Banna," he said, "so I hold the same ideas that a Lebanese, Jordanian, Yemeni, Libyan, Tunisian Brotherhood or even in Jakarta. Every group has the same thoughts. We share ideas and thoughts. We are an organization looking for a new era so we are organized and ready to deal with a new situation in the region. The Brotherhood has a huge responsibility on their shoulders. If they succeed they will have legitimacy to be leaders of Muslims and Arabs and if they fail they might lose their opportunity. We are preparing ourselves for 80 years. We are not dreaming we are dealing with reality."

"The Brotherhood is not like they were in the past," said one leader of the Homs Revolutionary Council (HRC) who receives money from them among many others. "There are Muslims Brothers in groups of two or three and they are giving support to people inside Syria. They are not organized like they were before." Leaders of the SMB in Saudi Arabia do not have good communication with the SMB in other places. Abu Mohammed al Rifai, an SMB leader in Lebanon gives support to some groups in Homs and elsewhere. The SMB does not have cadres on the ground, nor does it have much ideological influence. Most people I spoke to admitted that their role was limited to sending money but they were not sending it as the SMB, only as individuals who happened to belong to the SMB. In Homs some leaders view their role as positive but they did not see it as the SMB acting as an organization, which it did not have the capacity to do anymore. Homs receives help only from members of the Syrian wing of the MB who are based in the Gulf, Lebanon, or Jordan. Most of the money has gone to aid and medical support. In late 2011, the SMB had a meeting in Saudi Arabia during which they decided against supporting the armed groups. As the SMB they did not want to be involved in this, perhaps as a result of their experience in the 1980s, but individual members of the SMB send money that is channeled to insurgent activities as well.

I met Syrian activists who met senior SMB leader Melhem al Drubi in Turkey, where he was giving money to activists. Members of the Drubi family who live in Saudi Arabia are also important financiers of the uprising. "We told him we want money for weapons when we met him in Turkey in May [2011]," one activist told me. "He said no money for weapons this is peaceful revolution. We asked for money for hardship funds, he said we have people on the ground but we have not organized ourselves yet. He gave nobody that he met in Istanbul any money. He just wanted to know the situation on the ground. He wanted to know level of support for the Brotherhood. Now the Brotherhood controls a lot of access to money in Homs and the Damascus suburbs. But just because people take money from the Brotherhood does not mean they support it. The Brotherhood wants to improve and increase its name. They are not scary but they are trying to control. Some people are not happy about how the Brotherhood is financing on the ground. Some people who buy weapons are not ready to deal with the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood only gives certain people money for hardship or weapons."

Abu Abdu, a field commander who deals with military and civilian elements of the opposition in the Damascus suburbs told me that he had received calls from people in Jordan, Turkey, London, and the United States who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood. "People offer us money but there is a hidden agenda to it and we refuse it," he said. "This is a popular revolution, I work for God and the nation. I come out against oppression." He picked up his cigarette pack. "I'm not going to replace Marlboro with Gaullois."

"The Brotherhood doesn't scare me," said one leading activist from the Ismaili sect. "They don't have representation on the ground that can endanger democracy." A Christian activist he worked with on delivering weapons and aid throughout the country agreed with the assessment, adding that, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." One prominent Druze activist in Damascus said, "I am not

afraid of the Brotherhood. They have been outside, they became more secular. Syrian Islam is moderate and Sufi." Sufi brotherhoods are mystical groups organized around a sheikh who is believed to have a personal connection to God. Sufism is very mainstream in Syria, since most of the country's Muslim scholars have received some Sufi training and often specialize as Sufi sheikhs.

Many other members of the opposition are less sanguine about the role of the SMB. One young activist in Barzeh told me he did not want the Brotherhood. "I don't want women to be completely covered up," he said. "This is not nice." But like many people in the Arab world, he associated the word 'ilmani, or secular, with anti-religious, and as a result was also against Ghalioun. "I want something in the middle," he said. An older opposition supporter in the same neighborhood told me he wanted a civilian Islamic government "like in Turkey," he said, "but not Islam by force." The Brotherhood made a mistake in the 1980s, he continued. While the SMB in Damascus was engaged in peaceful proselytization, the Brotherhood in Aleppo and Hama took up arms. "It's a mistake to take up arms against a brutal regime. In reaction the regime thought anybody who prayed was in the MB. This is a revolution of the youth and it was good for the Brotherhood to deny that they are behind the revolution. The Brotherhood have no presence on the ground."

Another Damascus activist worried that many demonstrations in the Damascus suburbs had Islamic slogans. Indeed in Harasta I heard songs about Muslims and infidels. In Duma and Sanamein I heard demonstrators calling for jihad while in Zamalka in evening demonstrations people prayed in the middle of a busy commercial street. The activist told me that in Homs's Dir Baalbeh neighborhood, the Brotherhood's slogan of "Islam is the solution" was raised. "In the last months the Brotherhood became strong on the ground," he said. "Communists told me they won't go out in demonstrations that say 'God is great' and religious things. A lot of demonstrations in Daraa, Homs, Idlib are led by clerics and it scares secular people." He complained that the SMB chose the names for the Friday demonstrations. "'So National Unity' Friday became 'Khalid bin al Walid' [the early Muslim leader who conquered Syria in the 7th century] Friday and 'We won't Kneel' Friday became 'We Won't Kneel Except before God."

Many Syrians with ties to the Brotherhood fled in the 1980s. Now, like the Attasis of Homs and the Abazeeds of Daraa, they send money back home. Throughout Syria I heard concerns from the opposition that money from SMB members was ending up in the hands of the wrong people. In Homs some funds were going to former criminals or to armed groups who acted without consulting with the local civilian political leadership of the uprising. In Hama and Idlib I heard similar complaints.

"We don't work with anybody," said Khaled Nasrallah, a leader of an armed group operating in Hama and Idlib, "not with the Brotherhood. We are a popular revolution. They want to control you and we are nationalists. We won't finish this oppression so somebody else will come and tell us what to do. We are worried about the future, after the revolution, worried about the Brotherhood or Salafis or other parties. We don't want somebody to tell us what to do in the future." A senior leader of the Homs Revolutionary Council told me "there is no organization called the Muslim Brotherhood inside Syria. This is the difference between Syria and other Arab countries. The sheikhs in Homs who have a revolutionary role are Sufis. None of them belong to movements."

In the Jabal Azawiya town of Fleifil people still recall the three times the Syrian army raided the area by helicopter and arrested locals. "They raided every village," according to one local leader. "From 1980 to 1988 they would constantly raid the villages." They also point to a massacre committed by the regime in the main square of Jisr al Shughur in 1980. In Idlib's Jabal Azawiya I met Yusuf al Hassan, a powerful former cigarette smuggler who leads an armed group and has been fighting the regime since June 2011. Hassan, who is said by other insurgent commanders to receive some help from Turkish military intelligence, crossed the border into Turkey and met with SMB Secretary General Riad al Shaqfa. But he didn't trust the SMB, he told me, and as a result the SMB now opposed him as well. "I asked for five representatives from the whole area to distribute aid through them," Hassan said. "The Brotherhood was against this. This was cause of my problems with the Brotherhood in Jabal Azawiya. The Brotherhood are not accepted among us, they are racist, thieves, corrupt. We are the middle Islam. They divided the revolution, sent money to a few people. People came to me and I gave weapons and bullets to everybody without discrimination. When our revolution got weaker in the summer four or five months ago, the Brotherhood intervention appeared." A fighter from Jisr al Shughur agreed with him. "We are Muslims, not Muslim Brothers," he said, provoking the laughter of other insurgents with us.

In rural Hama leaders of various armed groups resented a man called Abu Rayan who received help from the Brotherhood in Turkey and Jordan to fund his armed group. I met with him and other leaders of armed groups in a mountain safe-house bordering Hama and Idlib. Abu Rayan had a gray beard. He wore a pistol under his armpit. As we talked Abu Rayan sent a group of his men from his Abu Fida brigade to help men from Hama's Salahedin brigade who were besieged in the city's Hamidiya area. Other commanders resented him for not cooperating with them. Bassim, a commander from Hama told me that he had asked Abu Rayan for help in the past but had not received a single bullet. He only helped Hama city, the other leaders told me, while others cooperated as needed, including across the line into Idlib. Abu Rayan said he had met with Turkish intelligence. He was a vulgar man, whose cursing made the other men uncomfortable. "We kiss one thousand asses just so they can send us money for a satellite phone," he complained. The other men told me he was a former drug dealer in Hama city. "It made me hate the Brotherhood even more that they support a man like this," said a Sufi sheikh from rural Hama called Sheikh Omar Rahmun who also had an armed group which operated in rural Hama and Idlib.

The city of Hama was still a reservoir for the SMB, he told me, but the resistance was taking place in the rural areas surrounding it and Abu Rayan was not helping out the rural insurgency. "Abu Rayan doesn't fight," said the sheikh. "He is a leader. Abu Rayan gets help from the SMB but the people in his group don't know this. Ninety percent of Abu Rayan's men would leave if they knew he works with the SMB. We want the revolution to win. We want the people who get help not to put it in their pocket but to give it to the people in need. People have empty ammunition clips. Abu Rayan has money, we don't."

"The U.S. won with an alliance with the Brotherhood in Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt" he said. "America cooperates with the Brotherhood. But the alliance has to be studied. This alliance is failed. There was a long information war against the Brotherhood and it is now an expired product. It is being treated as bigger than its size on the ground. The Brotherhood does not have a presence on the ground but it gave some money and communication devices to some groups. They give you money now so they can ride on your shoulders in the future. After June or July [2011] groups and parties started to appear. 'I am from this party or that party.' Our

disaster is the Brotherhood in particular. The Brotherhood don't have future in Syria without coercion. In Syria one party cannot win over other parties. We refuse to work under any party. We don't want a party that society doesn't accept. We don't want people to be coerced. Syria is a Sufi society. With two beats of the of miz-har (a Sufi drum) you can get all of Syria behind you, but they won't follow Salafis after 50 years."

The word "Salafi" haunts the Syrian uprising. The regime has turned this conservative practice of Islam into a smear of the opposition, hoping to associate them with jihadist Salafis like those of al Qaeda in Iraq. In nearly every demonstration I attended opposition songs dismissed the notion that they were Salafis. But in Syria, as elsewhere in the Middle East, some practices associated with Salafis have become popularized even if people do not identify themselves as such. In part this is thanks to the influence of Saudi Arabia. And it is Syrians in Saudi Arabia who play a major role in financing the uprising, giving them additional influence. In four months traveling through Syria, I found Salafis to be a minority within the uprising, but nevertheless they play a growing role.

In November 2011, I first met one of the most powerful men in Damascus's urban suburb of Harasta. Tough looking activists in tracksuits who arranged our meeting were contemptuous of the local opposition coordination committee. "The Sheikh," or Abu Omar, was not from the committee, said one, "he is from the group that fears God." The men explained to me that it was not the coordination committee that was in charge of Harasta, it was the "shabab," the guys like them. Abu Omar was a thick man wearing a dish dasha and leather jacket. As we spoke over dinner, he asked me if I knew what a Salafi was. I said it was somebody who followed the righteous companions of the Prophet Mohammed. "It's somebody devoted in his religion who doesn't stray to one side or another," he said. "Now they use Salafi to mean al Qaeda or terrorist. The Syrian regime is trying to persuade the West that it is fighting terror like the West," adding that "they failed." We sat in a room full of religious books and talked about the very active armed opposition in Harasta. "Violence has bred violence," he said. Abu Omar explained that their struggle against the regime was a jihad, but without foreign military intervention (and he did not care from where), the regime would not fall.

Abu Abdu, a military leader in Harasta confided that many people hoped there would be a declaration of jihad against the regime. "But they don't want to be accused of being Salafis." He did not expect such a declaration because the regime was not led by infidels and there were many Muslims in it, while the opposition also feared being accused of sectarianism.

In the Ghab area of rural Hama I spent many hours sitting with insurgents and local sheikhs. "We don't meet in mosques because the revolution is Islamic but because mosques are the center of gathering for people," said Sheikh Amer, an imam in the town of Qalat Mudhiq. Men in the room dismissed the government's accusations that they were Salafis. "Some of these guys drink," one of them told me. "Our religion Islam is tolerant," one said, "we won't be like them," meaning Alawites. "There will be no mercy for the Alawites who carried weapons or were shabiha," the sheikh told me.

In March, Sheikh Amer gave a sermon about speaking right in front of an oppressive sultan. A demonstration followed the prayer. Syrian security called him in and asked why he was inciting people. Sheikh Amer is now a spiritual and moral advisor to the armed men. I was told, "he teaches the guys what is permitted and forbidden, values, don't harm Christians and Alawites, don't steal."

I drove through many "liberated" villages where insurgents had their own checkpoints and patrols. I met Abu Ghazi, a self-proclaimed "moderate Salafi" and the representative of the Ghab coordination committee on the Hama Revolutionary Council. Abu Ghazi was respected by other militia commanders in the Ghab. He was in his 30s and had a short beard with no mustache. His house had just been attacked by regime security forces for the third time and destroyed. He complained that the committee was neglected. "The Brotherhood support their group, Salafis support their group, secularists support their group. I am buying a satellite phone with my own money. I have a farm, so I make money from that. People are selling fish so I can buy bullets for the guys. We have a national agenda. I don't want the agenda of the Brotherhood or Salafis. I want a national agenda, even if I am a Salafi. I know the situation here better than somebody in Europe, Saudi, or UAE. I don't want a sectarian war here. We would get a lot of help if we gave our area to one current. The Salafi jihadi current offered help. Salafi jihadis have a lot of money but need an oath of loyalty. The man who gives weapons doesn't give them for free." He feared chaos in the future if such parties gained influence. "I want law and order," he said.

I was in the Ghab when Syrian security forces raided nearby villages. Hundreds of fighters from village militias in the area gathered on the mountains above in case they were needed. Among them were insurgents from the Saad bin Muadh brigade, led by a Salafi called Abu Talha, who had links with groups outside Syria. "Abu Talha's group only works for themselves," a local militia commander complained. "They don't share and don't cooperate much." Abu Talha was originally from the village of Tweina in al Ghab. Like many Syrian Salafis he had spent time in the Sednaya prison. "They are all graduates of Sednaya," he said.

A Salafi commander of an armed group called Abu Suleiman united the area against him. "When people heard he wanted to make his own emirate all the mountain turned against him," said a local village militia leader. "We are all brothers from here to Daraa. We are revolutionaries and that's it. No parties."

"Salafis like Abu Suleiman in Jabal Azawiya offer to loan you weapons for specific operations," other insurgents told me. But they had refused. Abu Suleiman was a former drug dealer, they said, who became a Salafi after spending time in the Sednaya prison. "Abu Suleiman had conditions for helping others," said a fighter from Kafr Ruma village in Jabal Azawiya. "He said 'be under my emirate and give me back the weapons when the operation is over.' But we won't remove Bashar to be under somebody else. So Abu Suleiman is rejected by the mountain. We expelled him, he was extreme." He was now in Turkey, they told me.

In quiet evenings the fighters of Jabal Azawiya gathered for large meals in different houses. One night I was with them for an immense tray of knafeh as they watched the nightly talk show with the sectarian exiled opposition cleric Adnan al Arur. He was very popular in the region, they said. Al Arur, whose anti-Shiite rants were divisive long before the uprising in Syria and whose name is often chanted in demonstrations, famously warned Alawites who participate in the repression that they would be chopped and that their flesh would be fed to dogs. Arur has not often spoken about Alawites and his popularity does not stem from his sectarianism but because he has religious credentials and speaks in an angry colloquial voice when praising the demonstrators every day. But his popularity has encouraged secular Sunni and minorities to prefer the regime.

"We are grateful to the Salafi fighters," said the Sufi Sheikh Omar Rahmun who led an armed group in Hama. "But I am against canceling people, I am against canceling you and you canceling me. Of the fighters, Salafis are less than one percent." One night Sheikh Omar led a group of fighters in a Sufi style of singing called a Mulid. "Its good that Sufis raise their head a little bit so people won't think the revolution is Salafi," one of the local fighters told me. The role of Sufi clerics in the opposition should not come as a surprise. I have seen Sufi insurgent groups in Falluja and other parts of Iraq and as well as armed Sufis in Somalia and Afghanistan.

Further north, rural Aleppo has hundreds of fighters in the insurgency. In the town of Anadan, slogans for "the Faruq revolution" are written on walls. Faruq is another name for Omar, a figure revered by Sunnis. On other walls people sent their greetings to Omar as well as Abu Bakr and Uthman, who are also revered by Sunnis. Many men from the area volunteered to fight in Iraq. While most of the activist leaders in Anadan have university degrees in subjects like chemistry, mathematics and Arabic, all of them are Islamists and some are Salafis.

A 48-year-old man called Abu Jumaa leads the uprising there. His son spent one year in an Air Force intelligence prison, accused of belonging to the jihadist group Jund Asham and enduring severe torture. Before the revolution many of Anadan's youths were accused of Islamic extremism and arrested. One Friday in February demonstrators shouted, "the people want a declaration of jihad!"

Abu Jumaa arranged for the armed and unarmed needs of the revolution in Anadan. In his house he has Kalashnikovs, shotguns, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). One of the spiritual leaders of the revolution in Anadan is a sheikh called Yusuf who is not a Salafi. The Muslim Brotherhood still has influence in Anadan, which suffered in the 1980s during the Brotherhood's uprising and many residents were banned from state employment.

Armed locals in Anadan claim that security forces have not raided the town "because if they come security will be massacred." Non-Sunnis were removed from the military security headquarters in Anadan so that they would be less likely to be killed by insurgents. One Friday morning in December 2011, opposition activists tore down a large picture of Assad in the main square. One of the guards

in the nearby security headquarters cheered them on. By February, the security forces had been expelled by the insurgents from Anadan and its men were working on helping their brethren in Aleppo.

Another pan-Islamist movement, Hizbultahrir, or the Party of Liberation, is also reappearing. In Sanamein, the second largest town in Daraa province, I met with Abu Khalid, one of the political leaders of the uprising there who also often led demonstrations. Sanamein was a conservative town. Most people prayed. All its sheikhs were Shafii, there were no Sufis, and it seemed as though everybody loved sheikh Adnan al Arur. Abu Khalid belonged to Hizbultahrir, a utopian pan-Islamic organization committed to reestablishing the caliphate through peaceful means. Despite his affiliation with this movement Abu Khalid was against the involvement of any political party. "I am against giving a religious tone to the revolution." He added, "It's a popular revolution."

In January, leaders of armed groups in Homs including those from the opposition's Faruq Brigade sent messages to the Muslim Brotherhood complaining that the Brotherhood was smuggling weapons into Homs but hiding them or burying there. "They avoid to use their weapons now to fight and we are afraid that they want us to defeat the regime and then they will use their arms when we are tired." The Brotherhood had no people on the ground, all leaders in Homs agreed, but there were signs they were trying to recruit from other groups. The discovery that they were hiding weapons had created a crisis of trust. The utopian group Hizbultahrir has long had a presence in Homs. Many of its members were arrested over the years, but it was not a violent group and hence they spent less time in prison than others. They have made their presence felt in Homs once again, building a network and financing some armed groups.

In late December 2011, some men belonging to Hizbultahrir tried to raise the black and white flag of Islam in the Inshaat neighborhood of Homs. They also distributed leaflets in Inshaat saying it is religiously prohibited to deal with the Americans or ask for support from NATO, people should only depend on God. The local political opposition committee in Inshaat told them they did not want these things in their neighborhood. Likewise HRC activists stopped the Hizbultahrir men from raising the flags, explaining that only flags approved by the HRC could be raised. The HRC leadership warned their people in Inshaat to be careful because Islamists could use this incident to say the HRC is against Islam. But others complained to the HRC about their refusal to raise the flag of Islam.

"Islamists are going so fast," a leader of the HRC told me. "They are not waiting. A few days ago Hizbultahrir put up flag of Islam, but everybody knows that this slogan is for Hizbultahrir. Hizbultahrir started recruiting, they were arrested in previous years, and now they started again building their networks. They started working with armed groups. Financing them. Other Islamists also started working, they believe the regime is about to fall and they started building their relationships."

"This generation is enlightened and was not raised in Salafi education, unlike Egypt," said one leading activist from Homs. Salafi satellite television stations like Safa and Wesal are popular in Syria because Syrians were deprived of being religious for years, he told me. "Syria was the kingdom of silence for a long time," he said. "Arur was the first to speak with this courage. People don't like Arur because he is Salafi or Sufi. I watched him in the beginning. He was a sheikh and the words that came from him were trusted and he spoke with courage."

He spoke of Syria's most senior cleric Said Ramadan al Buti. "If Buti spoke in one hundred degrees less than Arur he would be more popular than Arur," he said. "Buti's thoughts are good, if he was with the revolution and spoke then Bashar would have left a long time ago. We want a man who is enlightened and a thinker. People liked Burhan Ghalioun at first. They stopped liking him not because he was secular but because they feel like he didn't deliver. I respect him because he is enlightened and stood with the people. The people are more simple than the parties, they want a program, to eat to live freely, not to live under oppression and a security member will mess up the neighborhood, and they want something tangible and something to be proud of. This generation is not Muslim Brothers, Hizbultahrir, or Salafi. They want somebody who will serve them. But we can't deny that this is an Islamic society so somebody could take advantage of Islam for electoral purposes."

"Some people are disappointed," said another leader of the HRC. "And don't expect anything from the Arab League which is a League of Arab dictators and the security council did nothing for us so some Islamists think we have to depend only on god and call on jihad.

Those depressed people now blame the sheikhs because sheikhs do not call for jihad and people try to pressure sheikhs to make call for jihad." But he disagreed with this. "Why should we announce jihad? Just to give regime excuse to kill us?"

The Syrian uprising's reliance on outside help will only increase radicalization. In January officials from the HRC complained to me that the live broadcasts of Homs demonstrations shown on networks like Al Jazeera Mubashar were controlled by a Salafi, Abu Yasir, who falsely claimed he was in Homs and was causing problems for them. During a January sit-in in the Homs neighborhood of Khaldiyeh the HRC tried to arrange for a senior member and founder of their council to speak to protesters live from his exile in Jordan. This member was a Sufi sheikh from the Bab Assiba neighborhood who had played a key role from the first days of the uprising encouraging people to demonstrate and maintaining discipline over the armed groups. "We wanted him to talk to the crowd because the people of Homs love him and they will obey him," an HRC official told me. "But the guy on the laptop said first I want to ask the coordinator (Abu Yasir) and the coordinator said no we don't want him, we want Arur, so Arur spoke to the crowd." He complained that in Homs too many of the media coordinators were in Saudi Arabia.

Unlike places I visited in Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, in opposition strongholds the residents do not live in fear of Salafis and there are no armed Salafis imposing themselves on the population. But the alleged suicide bombings of December 2011 and January 2012 in Damascus and February in Aleppo do raise the possibility that the regime's propaganda will be a self-fulfilling prophecy. "The more time the revolution extends the Salafis will be stronger," one activist told me. "Each month that goes by the movement turns more Islamic and more radical Islamic. If it had succeeded in April or May of 2011 there would be more civil society."

The Americans and Europeans assess that the regime was not behind the attacks. A western official based in Damascus said the bombings were both against "known staging grounds for mukhabarat and shabiha. Where they gather and get their assignments. Our defense attache used to see hundreds of mukhabarat in front of the branch buildings every Friday morning." A senior western diplomat told me, "The car bombs are a murky matter. If my time in Algiers and Baghdad is any guide, we may never know the full story." Before the December 23, 2011 attacks a senior western diplomat told me that al Qaeda was in Syria and he was very worried they might conduct attacks. Syria was a major source of jihadists and suicide bombers in Iraq, as even Syrian security officials often admit. It was a transit point for other foreign fighters going to Iraq. One senior western diplomat worried that veterans of the Anbar campaign would use their expertise in Syria.

Residents of Daraa, the suburbs of Damascus, or other opposition strongholds feel like they live under occupation. Opposition supporters talk about "occupied" or "liberated" areas. Opposition strongholds that are "occupied" are surrounded and divided by checkpoints. Security and soldiers demand identity cards from passers by, ask men to get out of their vehicles, enter bus and check the identity cards of all men on the bus, conduct armed patrols through neighborhoods, kick down doors, and arrest military age men. I was reminded of the feeling I had in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and southeast Turkey. While security and soldiers in Syria are not foreign, they are not local either and often have an Alawite accent. It is enough to create a sense of occupation. Occupation is a major cause of suicide attacks. On Fridays, which is when the suicide attacks occurred, security men gather in large groups at the same places every week so they can chase demonstrators, beat them, and shoot at them. They are a tempting target, easy and unprotected. While Syria is indeed a security state, its security apparatus has been overwhelmed lately and it is very easy to smuggle anything or anybody into and around the country.

One colonel from the political security branch complained that before their primary job was to prevent al Qaeda activity but now they allocated all their resources to repressing activists and responding to the armed opposition. Between 2005 and 2008, while I was researching my book "Aftermath" jihadi Salafis in Jordan and Lebanon from the Zarqawi network told me the final battle would be in Sham, the classical name for Syria. They hated Alawites. They are an experienced bunch who would support suicide bombings against security forces working for a regime they could describe as infidel who attacked people coming out of mosques. As the crackdown increases, as the local opposition's sense of abandonment by the outside world increases, and the voices calling for jihad get louder, there will likely be more radicalization.

Nir Rosen, author of "Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World," spent four months in Syria reporting on the uprising for Al Jazeera.

Islamic Evolution

By Piotr Zalewski, August 11, 2011

ISTANBUL — Fawaz Zakri was 17-years-old when his father told him to pack his bags, bid goodbye to his family, and cross the border into Turkey. The year was 1981, and the northern Syrian city of Aleppo, where Zakri had grown up, was in the throes of a violent anti-government insurgency led by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.

Zakri's father feared that his son's links with the Brothers would be enough to land him in jail, or worse. "I was a sympathizer," Zakri qualifies, "but not a member." Two years earlier, the Brotherhood had attacked a local military academy, killing dozens of cadets in an assault that marked the beginning of an all-out war between the Sunni Islamist group and the Alawite regime of Syrian President Hafez al-Assad.

Protests, assassinations, and terrorist attacks, many carried out by the Brotherhood, had since become routine. Syrian troops and security forces responded with a ruthless crackdown, at times employing artillery fire against neighborhoods in Aleppo. The war culminated in 1982, when, in the wake of another Brotherhood uprising, Assad's troops killed tens of thousands of people in the city of Hama. The massacre crushed the Brotherhood's Syrian wing, and its surviving activists scattered — many eventually settling across the border in Turkey.

Zakri's escape placed him beyond not only the reach of the Syrian regime, but also the militant ideology of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood of that era. Thirty years removed from his flight, Zakri is a graduate of one of Turkey's finest universities, an iPhone-toting businessman with a trade in grains and heavy machinery, and a fluent English speaker. He is also, at least to some extent, a changed man — a committed Islamist, to be sure, but one of a different hue. "After we came to Turkey," he says, "people like me, we faced a revolution in our thoughts."

While many in Europe and the United States fear that Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has introduced a dangerous Islamist influence into the country's traditionally secular and Western-oriented stance, religious groups struggling to overthrow stagnant autocracies across the Arab world take a different lesson from the party's success. Particularly in Syria, where President Bashar al-Assad's crackdown on a domestic uprising has become increasingly brutal during the holy month of Ramadan, pious activists have looked to Turkey as a model for reconciling their faith with the democratic hopes of the Arab Spring.

But Turkish politicians steer clear of the "M" word. "We do not use that language because we do not want to patronize anyone," Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's chief foreign-policy advisor, Ibrahim Kalin, told me. "We do not want to impose our experience on others." There is more to this, of course. The days when the Arab world suspected Turkey of being a U.S. "Trojan horse" in the Middle East might be long gone, but the Turks, who remember President George W. Bush's repeated references to the "Turkish model," remain wary of being seen as doing the West's bidding.

As Syrians continue to risk their lives to call for an end to the Assad regime, however, the impact of the Turkish experience on the Brotherhood's political evolution is coming into clearer focus. In 2002, under the leadership of Ali al-Bayanouni, the Brotherhood publicly disavowed violence and embraced parliamentary democracy. In the years that followed, it called for free elections in Syria and announced its support for women's rights. In April 2011, during the early days of the Syrian uprising, Brotherhood leaders held a news conference in Istanbul in which they denounced the Assad regime. And then in June, at a Syrian opposition conference held in the Turkish city of Antalya, Brotherhood members put their signatures on a declaration that called for "the freedom of belief, expression, and practice of religion, under a civil state."

Bayanouni, who headed the group from 1996 to 2010, continues to strike notes that place him more in line with today's pious Turkish politicians than the hard-edged Brotherhood leaders of days past. "Firstly, we believe that the state in Islam is a civil state, not a state ruled by any religious leaders or clerics," he told me, speaking from London. "Secondly, we cannot impose any particular way of dressing on citizens....We do call for and encourage [women] to wear the hijab and to follow Islamic behavior and action, but individuals must be free to choose what they want."

Although the Brotherhood isn't new to parliamentary democracy, said Bayanouni, citing the group's participation in Syria's 1961 elections, the AKP has provided it with a blueprint for reform. "The AKP is neutral in the area of religion — neither does it impose religion upon Turkish citizens nor does it seek to fight religion," Bayanouni noted, "and for this reason we find [it] to be an excellent model."

Erdogan's critics would shudder at the thought of his government being upheld as a model for liberal reform. Concerns about creeping authoritarianism in Turkey are on the rise: The 2010 Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders ranked Turkey 138 out of 178 countries, dropping it almost 40 notches from 2007. A high-profile investigation into an alleged coup has led to the arrest of several prominent journalists, feeding fears that the government is using the judiciary to jail or silence its critics. Most recently, Turkey's top generals quit en masse, sparking fears of a confrontation between Erdogan and the strictly secular military establishment.

It is a matter of debate whether the Brotherhood's makeover reflects a genuine change of heart or an effort to strengthen its ties with the Turkish government — one of the most critical international players in the effort to increase pressure on Assad — and make the organization more presentable to the rest of the Syrian opposition. But at the very least, the rhetorical shift represents a triumph of pragmatism over Islamist ideology. "I think [the Brothers] themselves know that the very strong fundamentalist positions are impossible to apply these days in Syria," says Rime Allaf, a Syrian researcher at Chatham House. "Twenty or 30 years ago, they were a force that would have presented a lot of question marks for the rest of society." Today, however, "speaking as somebody who is secular...I can give them the benefit of the doubt."

Turkey did not spark the Brotherhood's interest until the 2000s, with the rise of the AKP. The party was built on the ashes of the Islamist Welfare Party, which enjoyed its heyday in 1996, the year its leader, Necmettin Erbakan, rose to become prime minister in a coalition government. The fall from grace came quickly. Erbakan — viewed as a challenge to the country's secular system and its pro-Western orientation — was unseated by the army after only a year in power.

For Erbakan's protégés, including Erdogan, the experience was as sobering as it was formative. Their new party, founded in 2001, ditched the Islamist rhetoric, promised a range of democratic reforms, and embraced the prospect of Turkey's accession to the European Union. The AKP swept to power a year after its birth. It has not lost a single election since.

The AKP's success in bridging the gap between Islamist principles and Western norms attracted the admiration of Brotherhood sympathizers such as Khaled Khoja, head of the Turkish chapter of the Damascus Declaration committee, an umbrella group of the Syrian opposition. Khoja spent two years in a Syrian jail between 1980 and 1982, he says, on account of his father's affiliation with the Brotherhood. Following his release, Khoja left Syria and arrived, via Libya, in Turkey. He was only 17 years old.

"[Abul Ala] Maududi, [Ruhollah] Khomeini, Sayyid Qutb," he says, listing the names of the Islamist firebrands from years past. "Their manner was not successful for Islamic communities, producing division and conflict. The Turkish manner has showed us a different [way]."

The debate on Islam in the West often centers on the question of whether the religion can be a vehicle for democracy. But for activists like Zakri, the most pressing question has been whether democracy could be a vehicle for Islam. Now, armed with a modified version of what constitutes an Islamic state, he believes the answer is yes.

"When we were young, we thought of an Islamic state as a state ruled by Islamic laws," he says. "Our conversion, in Turkey, was to see that Islamic states give the freedom to choose, provide justice, protect religion, human life, thought, dignity, and property."

Although the experience of living abroad, particularly in Turkey, has helped moderate the Syrian Brotherhood's Islamist agenda, it has also aggravated a generational conflict within the group. Younger activists such as Khoja refer to themselves as part of the Brotherhood's "second generation," a moniker that distinguishes them from the group's traditional leadership. Their grievances have less to do with the Brotherhood's agenda than with its style of governance. The Brotherhood's "autocratic, tribal structure," says Khoja, has become antiquated and ineffective. "The old generation is focused on leadership," he says. "We're focused on solutions."

Obeida Nahas, director of the London-based Levant Institute and a Brotherhood member, notes that members of the Brotherhood's old guard are heavily burdened by the experience of life under authoritarian rule in Syria. He maintains that leaders of the new generation, including himself, have different views that are informed by growing up in places like Europe or Turkey. "The ideological [component] in the new generation is very light," he says.

The Brotherhood in Syria was shattered after its confrontation with the Assad regime in the early 1980s, the group now a shadow of what it once was. Syria's uprising, however, has shown that dissent is still alive in the group's former strongholds; Hama, the Brotherhood's graveyard in the 1980s, has seen massive protests and a brutal government crackdown in recent weeks. The Turkish model may just provide the Brotherhood with a way to shake off the mistakes of its past, harness the momentum of the Arab Spring, and help a new generation of activists bring down Assad.

But first, activists like Nahas may need to break ranks with their own leaders, they say. The story of the AKP's rise — Erdogan's break with Erbakan, his former mentor, and his subsequent embrace of a more inclusionary type of politics — has not gone unnoticed among the Syrian Brotherhood's younger members. The AKP's success, says Nahas, "made people feel that they could do a revolution inside their organization and get somewhere." Groups like the Brotherhood were designed as secretive, underground organizations to escape the reach of hostile security forces. "This means that now, with the openness, they have to change."

Piotr Zalewski is the Turkey correspondent for Polityka, Poland's bestselling newsmagazine. His work has also appeared in the National, TheAtlantic.com, Insight Turkey, and Turkish Policy Quarterly.

Meet Syria's Opposition

By Randa Slim, November 2, 2011

The divisions among the Syrian opposition groups remain daunting, despite prodding from abroad and some progress toward unification. The Syrian National Council (SNC), recently formed in Istanbul, Turkey, remains a work-in-progress. The Damascus-based National Coordination Committee (NCC) is at odds with the SNC. The organizations disagree on two of the most urgently contested issues: dialogue with the regime and foreign intervention. Meanwhile, youth activists are divided among three national coalitions. The military defectors formerly divided between the Free Officers Corps and the Free Syrian Army have coalesced under one organizational umbrella, but according to officials in both the Syrian National Council and the Free Syrian Army, there are no formal communication channels yet between the two entities.

This fragmentation and disunity poses a formidable challenge. It makes it difficult to assess who is representing whom, the level of public support each enjoys among Syrians, and the role each is playing in the protest movement. While it is impossible to know which side commands a majority, a critical mass of Syrians has clearly opted for regime change. In this quest, they are laying their lives on the line. The challenge is whether the different leadership centers in the opposition could overcome their differences and coalesce under a unified organizational umbrella akin to Libya's Transitional National Council.

Two main political umbrella organizations have emerged within the Syrian opposition: the Syrian National Council (SNC) chaired by Burhan Ghalioun and the Syrian National Coordination Committee (NCC) chaired by Hussein Abdel Azim. The *Syrian National Council* is a group of political parties, movements, and independents. Its principal components are the Damascus Declaration Group (Syrian reformist intellectuals), the Muslim Brotherhood, representatives of the Istanbul Gathering (a group made up mainly of Islamists and independent technocrats), youth activists, individual Kurdish activists, and Assyrians. Minority groups such as the Alawites, Christians, Shiite, and Druze are poorly represented. The *National Coordination Committee* is an internal opposition bloc

consisting of 13 left-leaning political parties and independent political activists including three Kurdish political parties and youth activists. The Syrian National Council offers a better constellation of the major political parties and movements in the opposition, and has been the object of most recent international attention. But neither of them can claim to be the sole interlocutor in the name of the Syrian opposition forces.

The two groups differ over the urgent questions of dialogue with the Syrian regime and foreign intervention. The NCC calls for dialogue conditional on the withdrawal of the military from the streets, the cessation of the regime attacks against protesters, and the release of all political prisoners. The SNC is opposed to a dialogue with the Assad regime except one that would address the modalities of the devolution of power from the Assad regime. While both the NCC and SNC are in principle opposed to foreign military intervention, the SNC membership is not united around this principle. Some SNC members, especially the youth activists, have been calling for the imposition of a no-fly zone and the protection of civilians including a NATO-led intervention akin to the one in Libya. The NCC prefers economic sanctions and other diplomatic measures in order to ratchet up pressure on the Syrian authorities.

The youth activists who launched the revolution on March 15, 2011 and are now leading the demonstrations are the true heroes of the revolution. They range in age from 17 to 35 and hail from different socio-economic and professional backgrounds. These men and women have shed the fear of political engagement that has always plagued Syrian citizens under the Assad regime(s), and some have used social media to reconnect with the public sphere. The majority of the youth activists is non-ideological in the traditional sense of Arab political parties, and is motivated by the quest for freedom, dignity, and economic justice. The core of the protesters comes from the Syrian poor and middle classes that have been marginalized politically and economically by the Syrian regime.

At the outset, the activists organized themselves into small local committees to document and publicize the uprisings. Over time, they have evolved into a web of commissions, councils, and unions formally grouped around three coalitions: the Syrian Revolution General Commission (SRGC), the Ghad alliance (including the Local Coordinating Committees or LCCS), and the Higher Council of the Syrian Revolution. While all three groups have pledged their support for the Syrian National Council, only the latter two have formal representatives. The Higher Council of the Syrian Revolution is mainly Islamist in its orientation. Its leading activists originally hail from Homs and its suburbs as well as Idlib. Of the three coalitions, the SRCG and Ghad are the better organized, have good media outreach, and have bureaus and networks in different parts of Syria. Activists in all three coalitions oppose the NCC's call for dialogue with the regime.

The Syrian opposition also includes three Islamist groups, the largest of which is the Muslim Brotherhood. Historically, they have been locked in a war against the Assad family. The most notable period of tension was between 1975-1982 leading up to the Hama massacre when the Syrian regime killed close to 20,000 Syrian civilians and forced the Brotherhood leadership into exile. Because the organization's leaders have worked outside of Syria for over 30 years, it is hard to accurately assess the current level of support within Syria. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood leadership was initially taken back by the uprisings and has now become one of three major political factions inside the SNC.

The other two groups of Islamists are Syrian based Islamist scholars and activists and the Salafis. The scholars and activists lie at the moderate and liberal end of the spectrum of Arab Islamist parties. The Salafis constitute the smallest group of the Islamists, and are based in Deir el-Zour, Jisr Al Shoghour, and Syrian towns bordering northern Lebanon. In the past, many of these Salafis were given safe haven by Syrian intelligence services that relied on their services and networks to field suicide bombers and fighters into Iraq. Since the start of the Syrian uprisings, these groups have turned against their former masters and according to unconfirmed reports, have been involved in some sectarian revenge killings. There are also claims by that regime that this group consists of former al Qaeda.

Military defectors play an unclear role in the Syrian opposition. They claimed responsibility for an attack on a Syrian army convoy killing a military officer and eight soldiers in central Syria. In Homs, they are defending the neighborhoods coming under attack from the Syrian military. In other cities, they establish a ring around the protesters helping to defend them against soldiers and pro-regime militias. Their role is difficult to assess because it seems to differ from one region to the next. It is also hard to gauge the type

and level of coordination between the protesters and the defectors on one hand, and between the different hubs where the military defectors are located on the other. It is also still unclear what weapons the defectors have at their disposal and whether they are able to secure military assistance from neighboring countries.

The defectors are organized under the banner of the Free Syrian army (FSA), which is more a collection of small disparate groups than an army. The FSA leadership, headed by colonel Riad Al Assad, is headquartered inside Turkey along the Syrian border. The FSA is sectarian in character as nearly all the defectors are Sunni, while Alawites remain supportive of the Assad regime. In an interview with Al Jazeera TV, Burhan Ghalioun stated that the number of military defectors is estimated between 10,000 and 15,000, however these numbers are unconfirmed. According to activists working inside Syria, defections happen on a daily basis. An FSA officer told me that the rate and pace of defections has accelerated to the point that it is becoming difficult for the FSA leadership to keep track of them. Yet, these defections occur on a small-scale involving few officers and soldiers at a time. There have been two recorded incidents of battalion-level defections in Deraa both of which were quickly crushed by the Syrian security services.

Most of the Syrian opposition agrees on a few basic principles: toppling the Assad regime, maintaining the national unity of Syria, and remaining committed to the peaceful nature of the Syrian revolution. But there are sharp disagreements over dialogue with the regime, foreign intervention, and the militarization of the opposition.

The NCC is the only entity that still calls for a conditional dialogue with the regime. They argue that dialogue remains the least costly route to a political transition. All other components of the Syrian opposition including the SNC reject dialogue with the Assad regime arguing that any dialogue will be used by to divide the opposition and break down its resolve.

There are differing perspectives on the issue of foreign intervention inside the opposition ranks. One group consisting mostly of the NCC is opposed to any form of foreign intervention that would involve military measures including imposition of a no-fly zone, because it could wreak havoc in Syria as was the case in Iraq and Libya. Another perspective championed by the youth activists and the FSA calls for foreign intervention to protect civilians, establishment of a no-fly zone and the set up of a demilitarized buffer zone. The no-fly zone could escalate the rate of defections in the military ranks. The buffer zone could create a safe haven for military defectors and their families.

The SNC membership is divided among three groups in respect to their positions on military intervention. One group is opposed to any form of military intervention and argues that protests and other forms of civil disobedience should remain the only means to topple the regime. A second group is for military intervention irrespective of who leads the effort with some preferring a NATO-led effort. A third group argues that military intervention should be considered as part of a broader strategy including a host of legal, economic, and humanitarian measures and that the military intervention should not be NATO-led but fashioned more along the lines of the international coalition recently established in Libya under Qatar's leadership.

The great majority of the opposition including the SNC, the NCC, and the leadership of the youth activists argue for maintaining the non-violent character of the protest movement. They assert that militarization of the opposition would play into the hands of the regime that has been trying its best to cast the uprisings in a Sunni armed insurgency light. This position puts them at odds with the Free Syrian Army. The SNC is still unsure how it should deal with the Free Syrian Army. Some SNC members say the council must be careful not to support the FSA since it should not side with the defectors against the large bulk of Syrian soldiers. As one SNC member put it, "the others [soldiers] in the army are our sons too." Another SNC member argued that the FSA could represent the military wing of the Syrian opposition. To-date, there have been no official contacts between the SNC and the FSA despite the latter's call for the SNC to send a delegation to Turkey for negotiations.

Despite the majority's best efforts to maintain the peaceful character of the protest movement, developments on the ground might over time push toward the militarization of the opposition. There is accumulating evidence that there is ongoing weaponization of segments of the Syrian population. Activists inside Syria explain this development as citizens acquiring weapons for self-defense

purposes. As one activist from Homs told me, "we will not allow another Hama (massacre) to take place." To-date, there are no signs of an armed insurgency *a la* Iraq. This is partly because there has not yet been an overt push by regional powers such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia to arm the Syrian opposition including the Free Syrian Army. An FSA officer denied the report that Turkey has been arming them, but in his words are merely "helping with our protection and meeting our basic needs".

As the Saudi-Iranian confrontation intensifies, this situation might change. Like Iraq, Syria could become another proxy for the Saudi-Iranian competition. In his recent interview with Russian TV, Syrian president Bashar al Assad accused neighboring countries of funneling weapons and funds into Syria. He further added that specifying the countries responsible for these activities would require additional investigation. Pro-Assad Lebanese allies told me that Qatar and Saudi Arabia were the main funders. There is no independent evidence to substantiate such claims.

Absent an international intervention to force Assad out as was the case in Libya, there will be increasing calls from the activists for weaponization of the Syrian opposition and in particular, the Free Syrian Army to lead a military campaign to topple the Assad regime. The FSA would need funding, weapons, and training. Qatar and Saudi Arabia are poised to be the main funders of this effort. Being the host of the FSA leadership, Turkey is best positioned to provide the necessary logistical, operational support, and training for the FSA.

Randa Slim is an adjunct research fellow at the National Security Studies Program at the New America Foundation and a scholar at the Middle East Institute. You can follow her commentary on Middle East affairs @rmslim.

Chapter 10

PALESTINE

Gaza's Salafis Under Scrutiny

By Jared Maslin, April 25, 2011

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip were shocked in April 2011 when an Italian activist and journalist, Vittorio Arrigoni, was kidnapped and then murdered by a self-proclaimed Salafi jihadi group. Arrigoni, a bighearted man who I met several times during a two-month stay in Gaza, was well known around the Strip as a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause. "I come from a partisan family," he once told an interviewer. His grandparents had fought and died while fighting fascism in Italy. "For this reason," he said, "probably, in my DNA, there are particles that push me to struggle."

In a YouTube video Arrigoni's captors demanded that Gaza's Hamas government release Salafi prisoners from its jails within 30 hours or they would execute their hostage. With police closing in, the captors apparently decided not to wait for their own deadline and killed him the same day. Later, Hamas-affiliated police and security forces surrounded three suspects in a house in the Nuseirat refugee camp. Nuseirat is where the Salafi group *Tawhid wa Al-Jihad* (Monotheism and Jihad) is based. As documented in a video, Hamas authorities brought Hisham Sa'idini, the leader of *Tawhid wa Al-Jihad*, whose release the kidnappers demanded, from prison in an attempt to negotiate their surrender. Police also summoned the mother of one of the suspects, a Jordanian citizen, to aid in the negotiating process. According to Hamas officials, the standoff ended in a shootout in which the Jordanian threw a grenade at his two accomplices then shot himself.

In the initial days after the murder, Hamas officials insinuated that the perpetrators of this inexplicable crime were Israeli agents, although they were reluctant to make this statement unequivocally when speaking on the record. Of course, no evidence has emerged publicly to support this conspiracy theory. Others, particularly in right-wing Israeli and U.S. circles, seized on Arrigoni's murder in order to depict the Gaza Strip, and Palestinian society at large, as a monolithic den of fanatics. It ought to go without saying that this is not the case. Gaza's people, who belong to a wide and overlapping spectrum of religious and political views, universally condemned the murder. Similarly, all political parties, including Hamas, Fatah, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Resistance Committees, and even Salafi leaders, denounced the killing.

Beyond the tragic events of the story, however, Arrigoni's death highlights a complex political context, a web of power relations among various actors in Gaza including Israel, Hamas, the Palestinian Authority, the Salafis, other Palestinian factions, and the international community. At the root of these dynamics is the Israeli and Western policy of isolating Gaza and ignoring Hamas. The crippling four-year-long blockade of Gaza has created the conditions of human misery and desperation in which a handful of people have turned to extremism. A report from International Crisis Group states that the blockade has amounted to "an assist provided to Salafi-Jihadis, who benefit from...Gaza's lack of exposure to the outside world."

The Jihadi Salafis

Salafism is a stream of Sunni Islam that espouses a literalist reading of scripture and adheres to a conservative, puritan lifestyle. The International Crisis Group (ICG) states: "The Salafis attempt to follow the example of *salaf as-salih* (pious ancestors) — the first three generations of Muslims." Most contemporary Salafis in Gaza and elsewhere also practice nonviolence, and according to the ICG, the majority focus not on politics but on "conventional *daawa* activities — scholarship, education and social outreach — that serve as a means of "calling" others to Islam." In an interview in Gaza, Hamas official Ahmad Yousef described these traditional groups as "a few people on the street, knocking on doors, calling on people for soul purification."

Traditional Salafism arrived in Gaza in the 1970s when Palestinian students returned from religious schools in Saudi Arabia. To this day Salafi groups in Gaza receive support from Saudi sources. According to ICG, some, like the Ibn Baz Islamic society, are named after Saudi sheikhs. In the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has allowed Salafi groups to receive funds from Saudi Arabia as well. Fatah and the PA hoped the Salafis could pose an Islamic counterweight to Hamas. ICG reports: "Salafists have enjoyed the support of Fatah, which appointed them to PA institutions in an effort to compete with Hamas, and have voiced no opposition to the presidency of Mahmoud Abbas, whom they consider the *wali al-amr* (ruler)." As recently as late 2010, the PA reportedly appointed Salafi preachers to mosques in the West Bank.

Militant wing

The subset of jihadi or militant Salafis in Gaza includes four main groups: *Jund Ansar Allah* (Soldiers of God's Supporters), *Jaysh Al-Islam* (Army of Islam), *Jaysh Al-Umma* (Army of the Nation), and finally *Tawhid wa Al-Jihad* (Monotheism and Jihad), whose members were blamed for the killing of Vittorio Arrigoni. Although membership estimates vary widely, the jihadi groups are believed to include no more than a few hundred activists, mostly young men, some of them still in their teens. Two Hamas officials said these groups

together number fewer than 100 members. Many of these adherents are recruited from the armed wings of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. An unknown further number of cadres within these larger factions have sympathy for the Salafis or may participate in Salafi armed action.

The jihadi Salafis are opposed to Hamas over two primary issues: implementation of Islamic law — the jihadis want the imposition of a puritanical reading of *sharia* — and ceasefires with Israel, which they oppose on principle. *Tawhid wa Al-Jihad*, the organization whose alleged members were blamed for killing Arrigoni, is said to be one of the smaller groups. According to Hamas and other Salafis quoted by ICG, the group's leader, Hisham Sa'idni, is "more vehemently against Hamas than other Salafi-Jihadis." Saidini's first arrest by Hamas was followed by an escape, ICG reports, during Operation Cast Lead, when Gaza's central prison was destroyed.

The second of the two issues has arguably been more troublesome for Hamas. Salafis have been blamed for launching homemade rockets into Israel in violation of a ceasefire agreed upon by Hamas and the other armed factions in Gaza. With the exception of an escalation of violence in March 2011, Hamas and most other armed factions' policy since the end of Israel's devastating 2009 military offensive has been to maintain calm and to arrest fighters responsible for unauthorized attacks.

More recently, Hamas has enforced a system in which each of the main armed groups —Islamic Jihad, Popular Resistance Committees, and others — discipline its own members for ceasefire violations. Those who commit infractions are also denied the protection, prestige, and support of the faction, even if they are killed in the process. Perhaps realizing that a heavy hand can create further radicalization, Hamas has also recently taken a more nuanced approach to the Salafis, including sending religious scholars into prisons in hopes of nurturing a more tolerant outlook among them.

In November, Israel assassinated two members of the Salafi group *Jaysh Al-Isla*m in separate strikes, alleging that they were plotting attacks on Israeli and U.S. targets in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. (The Mubarak government in Egypt also accused *Jaysh Al-Islam* of carrying out the bombing of an Alexandria church, which killed 21 people on New Year's Day, 2011.) Hamas denied the Israeli allegations. "Maybe this is what the Israelis think, that they can justify to the Americans that they are targeting those people, because some of their rhetoric is that they [the Salafis] are targeting Americans, or trying to depict them as al Qaeda," said Hamas official Ahmad Yousef, when asked about the accusations leveled against *Jaysh Al-Islam*.

In both hits, Israeli drones or helicopters fired missiles at the men's cars as they drove on the busy streets of Gaza City, leaving only blackened wreckage. The killings threatened to trigger a wider crisis. Fighters — said to be affiliated with the Popular Resistance Committees —responded by firing mortars, homemade projectiles, and one Russian-type Grad missile into Israel. The Grad produced a loud explosion and a fireball in the sky over my temporary Gaza City residence. Less than a day later, that barrage ended with a meeting among the various militant groups and a renewed agreement to maintain the ceasefire. A well-connected Gaza analyst told me that Hamas might have turned a blind eye to the brief spurt of attacks in order to allow fighters to "let off steam."

This is the crux of Hamas' dilemma: if it allows attacks on Israel, it risks massive retaliation from the Israelis; if it imposes too strict a ceasefire, it risks eroding its credibility among its political base in Gaza, particularly among its armed cadres. A U.N. diplomat, quoted anonymously by ICG explained the problem: "How long can Hamas sustain a policy of not engaging in resistance, while this non-engagement doesn't produce any results in terms of liberating Palestine, easing the blockade, or any other political goal for which the movement exists?"

Still, Hamas officials I spoke with dismissed the theory that the Salafists posed a significant challenge. Ehab Al-Ghussain, the spokesman for Hamas' ministry of interior, also downplayed the issue: "If you look by percentage, Gaza has the lowest percentage of these people [Salafis] in the world." Ghussain did explain, however, that the first of the assassinated men, Muhammad An-Nimnim, had been jailed by Hamas authorities in the past for actions "against the Palestinian government."

Nimnim was widely believed to have been a top aide to Mumtaz Doghmush, the leader of *Jaysh Al-Islam*, a former member of the PA's Preventive Security Forces, often described as a Mafioso-like figure. Doghmush's group cooperated with Hamas in the capture

of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in June 2006, but relations between the two groups soured over *Jaysh Al-Islam's* kidnapping s of westerners, which began with the August 2006 kidnapping of two Fox News journalists, and culminated in the prolonged captivity of BBC reporter Alan Johnston in 2007. Johnston was freed days after Hamas seized full control of Gaza in June 2007. He was the last foreigner kidnapped in Gaza until Arrigoni's abduction. Indeed, many Gazans credit Hamas for ending the lawlessness and chaos that characterized the last years of Fatah rule. According to Ghussain, however, Nimnim had been imprisoned for assisting another group, *Jund Ansar Allah*, whose challenge to Hamas rule marked another turning point in relations with the Salafis.

Rafah shootout

Jund Ansar Allah, which came into existence in late 2008, became prominent in June 2009 when it mounted a failed attack on Israeli soldiers using explosive-laden horses. After a summer of mounting tensions with Hamas, on August 11, 2009, the group's spiritual leader, Sheikh Abdul Latif Musa, delivered a sermon in a mosque in the city of Rafah in which he chastised Hamas and declared an Islamic emirate in Palestine. This declaration began a standoff with Musa's supporters that ended when Hamas security forces and Al-Qassam Brigades re-took the mosque by force. In a night of fighting, 28 people were killed including at least seven police — all Qassam members.

A man who identified himself as one of *Jund Ansar Allah's* only remaining members told me in an interview that the battle in Rafah had been a turning point, the beginning of a comprehensive crackdown on Salafi jihadis. "There is more pressure these days, we can hardly move here and there," he said. "It is very hard to work with [other] Salafis now, we are pursued by the Hamas government and the Zionists, both sides." More than 20 of his comrades were in Hamas-run prisons, he said. "Salafis do not convene like they used to do before because of the Hamas crackdown on them. Each group works alone, we cannot work as one group."

In regard to the assassination of Muhammad An-Nimnim, he even accused Hamas of passing information to Egypt that Israel could have used in the killing. "I believe a kind of coordination occurred between the Hamas government and Egypt's intelligence in detecting him," he said. "It is very well known that Egypt's intelligence sends security information to the Jews, provides them with information; Hamas thinks that this information actually is delivered to the C.I.A and the Mossad." (Asked about this later, interior ministry spokesman Ghussain denied this account, claiming, "Nobody actually imagines that Israel needs information from Egypt about Nimnim. They know everything. Maybe they give information to all sides. They have technology. They have spies. They have collaborators.") The man, who appeared to be in his 20s, said he was originally a member of Islamic Jihad but prefers Salafism because, "I believe it's good to follow a respected ideology than a corrupt one. We are completely against any truce with Israel. We will attack our enemy by every means according to our military capabilities, we will never hesitate or shy from resisting."

The role of the Salafi jihadis is not to be exaggerated, and much ambiguity still surrounds these groups' activities, intentions, and relations with other internal and external forces. Interior ministry spokesman Ehab Al-Ghusssain theorized that by targeting them for assassination, Israel was attempting to elevate these groups' importance. The jihadis have become, he said, "like a white paper, whatever you write on it, it will be."

Jared Malsin is the former chief English editor of the Palestinian news agency Ma'an. His Twitter feed is @jmalsin.