

# THE WEST AND THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AFTER THE ARAB SPRING



Lorenzo Vidino, Editor



مركز المسبار للدراسات والبحوث  
Al Mesbar Studies & Research Centre

Al Mesbar Studies & Research Centre  
in collaboration with  
The Foreign Policy Research Institute



"A nation must think before it acts."  
- Robert Strausz-Hupé

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## **About Al Mesbar Studies & Research Center**

Al Mesbar Studies & Research Center is an independent Center that specializes in the study of Islamic movements. The Center focuses primarily on contemporary Islamic movements, their thoughts and practices, symbolisms and ideologies and their historic impact.

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## **The West and the Muslim Brotherhood after the Arab Spring**

**Turki Al Dakhil Chairman, Al Mesbar Studies & Research Centre**

We are delighted at Al Mesbar Studies & Research Centre to partner with the Foreign Policy Research Institute in publishing this important book at an historic moment, for this work examines the West's relationship with political Islam, emerging from the largest shift ever witnessed in the Arab region in modern times.

While the Arab Spring was not Islamic at its beginning in 2011, Islamists today are the biggest winners, after their ascension to power. And they now threaten many regimes in other Arab countries.

The heart of this book is an examination of eight Western countries and their perspectives on the Islamists' ascension to power in the Arab Spring's aftermath. The chapters provide historical context, along with the official positions of each country and its policies before and after 2011.

The reader will also notice certain similarities in how these different Western countries have related to the Muslim Brotherhood over the years. Reactions, often provoked by fear are expressed in a consistent way. Specifically, domestic considerations are highlighted which led to policy formulations in these countries toward the Arab region on the one hand, and the Islamic factions on the other.

The chapters examine the oscillating relationship between Washington and the Muslim Brotherhood during the last two presidential administrations. The George W. Bush administration dealt with the Brotherhood infrequently and with great suspicion. Barack Obama's administration has engaged much more and established contacts with the Freedom and Justice Party, and supported democratization in the region.

In addition, several European countries are concerned about the rise of Islamists to power because they are aware of the persecution and harassment of minorities—especially Jews, Baha'is and Christians living among Muslims in Muslim-majority countries—as well as the poor treatment of women.

Certain Western countries' attitudes toward political Islam also are linked with domestic affairs, the extent of Islamists' responses to liberal and secular values, as well as the influential role played by the emergence of populist parties in Europe, and their use of political Islam for their own purposes, and the impact of immigration from the Middle East to these countries.

Officials in other countries have long considered the Middle East a source of terrorism. Yet, the importance of handling security matters and counterterrorism efforts hindered the establishment of closer relationships with the Muslim Brotherhood prior to 2011. However, after the Arab Spring,

the Muslim Brotherhood has become a central reality, with explicit calls to engage them in a dialogue.

The chapters in this book also illuminate the position of European countries that have an ambivalent and confusing history with Islamist movements, and in which political Islam has remained marginalized for decades. However, after the transitions that took place in 2011, these countries were encouraged to trust new Islamic political forces, once they became committed to democracy.

We hope this book helps reader understand a complex and significant new force on the world stage.

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## Introduction

Lorenzo Vidino

Before December 2010, virtually no one had heard of Mohammed Bouazizi outside of the dilapidated central Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid. Yet when he set himself on fire in front of the local governor's office, in a desperate protest gesture against the confiscation of his goods and the apparent humiliation he suffered at the hands of the local police, the poor fruit seller became the symbol of a protest movement that engulfed first Tunisia and then large swaths of the Arab world, changing the region's history.

In Tunisia and in Egypt the protest movements managed to topple the authoritarian regimes that had ruled the two countries for decades with only a small amount of blood being spilled, as the militaries decided not to intervene against protesters. In Libya, on the other hand, protests against the Muammar Gaddafi regime soon slid into a civil war that lasted until the fall, when the ruler was killed and the entire country fell into the hands of the militias headed by the Transitional National Council. Protests turned to violence also in Yemen, Bahrain and Syria, where at the time of this writing a real civil war is taking place. In virtually all other countries in the region there have been at least some protests against local regimes, testifying to the extensiveness of the phenomenon scholars have called the Arab Spring or Arab Awakening.

Few observers had foreseen such a momentous phenomenon. And most were also surprised that Islamist forces seemed to play only a marginal role, if any, in the protests. From Tunis to Cairo, from Sana'a to Homs, protesters criticized local regimes for their corruption and inefficiencies, demanded rights and jobs, and represented all walks of life and political persuasion. Islamic insignnia, demands for sharia and religious slogans were virtually absent. Indeed in some cases Islamist forces played an important role in organizing protests, thanks to their tested mobilization skills. Yet, due to the diverse nature of the protest movement, as well as Islamists' concerted decision not to visibly engage, in no country did the protests possess an Islamist undertone.

Yet, by the fall of 2011 and the first months of 2012, it became apparent that in several Arab countries Islamist movements were poised to be the main beneficiaries of the Arab Spring. In October, Ennahda secured 41 percent of the vote in the first post-revolutionary parliamentary elections in Tunisia, making it the country's main political party. Ennahda went on to lead a coalition government with secretary general, Hamadi Jebali, becoming its prime minister. After a lengthy process, in January 2012 Egyptian authorities announced that the Muslim Brotherhood's political party, Freedom and Justice, had won close to an absolute majority. Surprisingly, the Salafist al Nour won 25 percent of the votes, allowing Islamist forces a virtually unchallenged control over Egypt's People's Assembly. In June the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Mursi won the country's first free presidential election.

The Islamists' victories in the only two post-Arab Spring elections constitute monumental developments. Although wielding different amounts of power in each country, over the last few months Islamist forces have come to play a crucial, if not dominating, role in the political life of a geographical arch that, with the qualified exceptions of Algeria and Libya, extends from Rabat to Gaza. Moreover, while the situation is still very confused, Islamists seem poised to play a greater role in other Arab countries, whether that is participating in toppling a regime (as it would be the case in Syria) or by demanding concessions of current rulers (as has increasingly been the case in Jordan).

In the ever-changing environment that is the Arab world of the last two years it is difficult to predict what will be the political developments of the near future and, similarly, what role Islamist forces will play in each country. But it seems fair to state generally that Islamism, in its gradualist and pragmatic approach embodied by the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots worldwide, seems ready to reap the rewards of its three decades-old decision to abandon violence, instead focusing on political participation and grassroots activities. Although they played only a marginal role in the Arab uprisings, Islamist movements are likely to be among the main beneficiaries of the Arab Spring, possibly using their political mobilization skills and grassroots legitimacy to gain positions of power in the nascent democracies of the region.

This monumental change has created many concerns among liberals, religious minorities and, more generally, all non-Islamists in the countries where Islamists have won. In addition, Arab states ruled by non-Islamist regimes have expressed concern. The former worry that Islamist ideology—even in its participatory and more moderate version—remains deeply divisive and anti-democratic, often at odds with their values and interests. They have concerns about the sincerity of Islamist parties' commitment to democracy and their views on religious freedom, women's rights and free speech. The latter believe that on foreign policy issues, most of the positions of various Muslim Brotherhood-inspired parties are on a collision course with the policies of established regimes in the region. Moreover they fear a spillover effect through which local Islamist forces will feel emboldened and challenge the countries' stability.

This E-book offers a different perspective on the Arab Spring and the apparently consequent surge to power of Islamists: namely, the West's. If participants and observers of the Arab Spring in the region have expressed shock at its developments, commentators and policymakers in Europe and North America have been similarly mesmerized by the events of the last 24 months. After failing to foresee the Arab Spring and its developments, the West is now asking important questions. What does the rise to power of Islamists mean for Arab countries and for the West? Will they respect the nascent democratic life of these countries? What will their stance on human rights be? How will their surge affect Arab countries' relations with the West and foreign policies?

This book seeks to analyze the reactions in eight Western countries to the rise to power of Islamists after the Arab Spring. "The West" is in reality, only an abstract mental construction, a non-existent geopolitical entity. Indeed it is possible to observe that some common positions, and super-national entities such as NATO and the European Union which have been heavily involved in the recent



events in the Arab world, do act as unifying entities for the West. But every country of “the West” has its own priorities, historical past, economic and geopolitical interests when approaching the Arab world and Islamist movements. Each must therefore be analyzed individually.

Moreover, no Western country possesses a well-developed, long-established, and cogent policy concerning participatory Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood. In each Western country, positions have often changed not only with time, but also from Arab country to country. It is not uncommon, in fact, for a Western country to have held negative attitudes toward an Islamist movement in one country while seeking to engage a very similar Islamist movement in another. And all Western countries change positions based on political forces, as well as occasionally from individual to individual within the same political party, generating policies that can be described as schizophrenic.

This book provides an overview of each of eight countries’ policies towards Islamism. First, the authors outline the pre-Arab Spring history of relations of each country towards participatory Islamist movements in the Arab world. They then sketch each country’s attitudes and policies during the Arab Spring. And, finally, each author speculates about what the future holds, assessing how Western governments and political forces will likely interact with Islamist forces in the post-Arab Spring environment.

The first chapter, written by Steven Brooke, analyzes the United States, undoubtedly the country that, over the last four decades, has shaped the geopolitics of the region more than any other. Brooke, a young scholar with outstanding expertise on the subject, traces the history of the tormented relations between Washington and the Muslim Brotherhood, from timid Cold War era flirtation through the tensions of the last 20 years and, finally, to the begrudging opening of the post-Mubarak era.

The second chapter, written by Shiraz Maher and Martyn Frampton, traces the similarly convoluted relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and affiliated movements on one end and the British government on the other. Maher and Frampton, two scholars based at King’s College and Queen Mary respectively, highlight the interconnections between British foreign and domestic concerns when dealing with Islamists, particularly as, in the post-9/11 era, British authorities sought to use British-based Islamists to counter al Qaeda-inspired radicalization among British Muslims (a policy Maher and Frampton criticize).

The importance of domestic concerns is also highlighted in the chapter Alex Wilner wrote on Canada. Wilner, a scholar at the Swiss Federal Polytechnic, shows how Western governments and publics often see events in the Muslim world through the prisms of their domestic debates over Islam and the integration of their Muslim community. The chapter by Roel Meijer, a well-known expert on Islam at the University of Nijmegen, highlights similar dynamics taking place in the Netherlands by analyzing how Dutch media and politicians have seen Islam and Islamism, both domestically and internationally, over the last ten years.

The chapter by Guido Steinberg, Germany's foremost expert on Islamism and jihadism, goes deeper in time, dissecting the various phases of the German government's interaction with the Muslim Brotherhood; from its timid flirtations during the Cold War to its post Arab Spring guarded engagement. Jean-François Daguzan, a longtime observer of French policies at the Paris-based *Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique*, traces a similarly long history of confused and occasionally conflicting policies enacted by France.

The chapter by Ana Planet and Miguel Hernando De Larramendi Martinez, two prominent Spanish Arabists, outlines the historical trajectory of the relationship between Spain and Islamists in North Africa, Madrid's traditional area of influence. Finally, the chapter written by Benedetta Berti, a scholar at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv, deals with the views from Israel.

These contributions highlight important differences in the policies and attitudes of the eight countries analyzed. Each experience has been shaped by historical and geopolitical considerations unique to that country. Countries with a colonial past in the region, such as France and Great Britain, or with a deep involvement over the last decades, such as the United States, have well developed policies—even though that does not mean clear, coherent and permanent ones. Others that maintain only limited interests in the region have less developed policies toward—and even knowledge of—Islamist movements, and they often follow what leading Western governments do.

But despite important differences, there are striking similarities and recurring themes uniting all Western countries. While times, intensity and reasons vary, the historical trajectory followed by Western countries in their relationship towards the Muslim Brotherhood and, more generally, Islamist groups, follows a similar pattern. During the Cold War some Western countries timidly engaged the Brotherhood, assuming that it could be a partner in the conflict against Communism. With some notable exceptions, this engagement can hardly be considered an alliance. Relatedly, Western countries did not have an established policy towards Islamists, which were still a relatively small force.

As the Cold War ended, most Western countries stopped engaging Islamists. That happened largely for three overlapping reasons. First, the Iranian revolution triggered, for the first time, serious fears about Islamism in all Western capitals. Acts of violence carried out by various jihadist groups throughout the world in the 1980s and 1990s also contributed to these fears, particularly as the line between jihadist and Brotherhood groups was either blurred or poorly understood in the West. Second, Islamist positions on issues such as the compatibility between democracy and Islam, religious freedom, women's rights and Israel made Western policymakers very wary of the movement. Finally, authoritarian regimes throughout the region were very firm in demanding that their Western allies avoid engagement with Islamists.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s there were various behind-the-scenes engagements, often through third parties like foundations and think tanks. But the events of the Arab Spring and the subsequent understanding that Islamists are going to be playing a crucial role in the shaping of the Middle East

in the immediate future have led policymakers throughout the West to change their policies. While there are significant differences from country to country, now virtually all Western countries openly engage with Islamist forces in the region. Some might be doing so more guardedly and less enthusiastically than others, but engagement is the standard Western position.

Two noteworthy factors seem common to all Western countries. The first is the awareness by all Western countries, including powers and superpowers like France, Great Britain and the United States, that they cannot influence the developments taking place in the region. Long gone are the days in which Western powers organized coup d'états or counter coup d'états, picking and choosing the region's rulers. Throughout the Arab Spring and the political processes that have followed, Western countries have taken a "sit and wait" approach, letting events take their natural course. With the exception of Libya, the West has not interfered in any significant way in any post-Arab Spring country. While often mantled by moral considerations and the respect for peoples' self-determination, there is no doubt that an awareness of the actual inability to shape events is the key reason behind this behavior.

Finally, most of these chapters show the importance of domestic considerations in Western countries' policymaking towards the region and Islamist forces. With the notable exceptions of the United States and Israel, in virtually all Western countries analyzed here, it is evident that policymakers consider the views and reactions of the growing Muslim, and particularly diaspora, communities on their territory. Moreover, all Western countries have been concerned with the impact of the Arab Spring on their security, giving the utmost importance to its impact on terrorism, immigration and the potential radicalization of the local Muslim community. While policymaking on Middle Eastern affairs is largely made by foreign ministries, it would be a mistake to ignore the enormous domestic political considerations that shape such process.

# U.S. Policy and the Muslim Brotherhood

By Steven Brooke

On June 24, 2012 Mohammed Morsi, a candidate from the Muslim Brotherhood, won Egypt's first presidential elections. The same day, U.S. President Barack Obama called his counterpart to offer his congratulations on the victory. Morsi's high-profile triumph symbolizes the Islamist electoral successes that have followed in the wake of the Arab Spring. It is also a historic reversal. For while past U.S. Administrations preferred to keep Islamist groups at arm's length, now the United States must deal with them as equals, in positions of power in key states.

This chapter will trace the emergence of U.S. policy toward Arab Islamist groups, mainly but not exclusively through the lens of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. After briefly reviewing prior works on the subject, the chapter covers periods of episodic Cold War cooperation, governed by the logic of competition between the superpowers. The end of the Cold War eerily coincided with Algeria's attempt at electoral democracy, aborted when the military, with Western acquiescence, intervened to cancel the elections. This cast a long shadow over U.S. attempts to formulate a policy toward Islamist movements that continued into the Clinton Administration. Partially in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the George W. Bush Administration officially rejected Islamist movements, even as its policies brought them to power in Iraq and the Palestinian territories. During the Bush Administration there was also wide-ranging debate over Islamist groups, although these debates ran in tracks earlier controversies had worn. The Obama Administration made tentative but significant moves to renew contacts with Islamist movements, but was still left scrambling by the events of the Arab Spring.

## Islamism and U.S. Foreign Policy

A number of scholars have attempted to analyze U.S. (or more generally Western) policies toward political Islam. In *American and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* Fawaz Gerges suggests that, by and large, U.S. antagonism towards Islamists is based on Islamists' opposition to U.S. strategic interests, not cultural enmity.<sup>1</sup> Gerges allows, however, that latent cultural hostility towards Islam occasionally intrudes on the policymaking process, particularly via elected representatives in Congress.<sup>2</sup> Maria de Ceu Pinto largely agrees with the "clash of interests"—based

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<sup>1</sup> Fawaz Gerges, *American and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Gerges' analysis rings even more true today, as a group of Republican representatives, including former presidential candidate Michele Bachmann, have become obsessed with the idea of Islamists inside the U.S. government. In 2012, Bachmann and five colleagues wrote to the Inspectors General of the Departments of State, Justice, Defense, and Homeland Security, as well as the Director of National Intelligence, to request an investigation into Muslim Brotherhood contact with the above-named agencies. See "House Members Seek

approach in her historical survey of U.S. policy towards Islamist movements.<sup>3</sup> In an earlier study, Fuller and Lesser also argue that animosity between the West and Islam is largely due not to theology, but “political, economic, psychological strategic, and cultural” factors.<sup>4</sup>

While these studies are notable, one issue they confront is the tendency to downplay changes in policy. In essence, interests, such as support for Israel or protection of Middle Eastern energy resources, are fixed. Yet U.S. policies, on the other hand, vary. For instance, why does George W. Bush freeze out Islamists, while Obama begins a tentative outreach? Interest-based analyses often have trouble explaining why different presidents pursue similar interests in different ways.

Other analysts suggest that U.S. animosity toward Islamist groups is cultural. The United States needed a new enemy after the Cold War, the argument goes, and Islamism simply became the “next ism” the country must confront. As Ahmed Moussalli argues, “Islamic movements, and, at times, the Islamic world and Islam, have taken the place of communism as the arch-enemy.”<sup>5</sup>

The cultural explanations falter because they predict that U.S. policy towards Islam would be universally hostile. In reality, however, there is tremendous variation in U.S. policy towards Islam. The United States generally enjoys good relations with the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) in Morocco and, to a lesser extent, with the Islamic Action Front (IAF) in Jordan. The United States maintains a close alliance with Turkey which has since the 1995 elections always seen a significant Islamist presence in government. Finally, since the 1950s, the United States has allied very closely with the fundamentalist Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Why does the United States work closely with some Islamic actors while refusing to work with others? While these analysts are indeed correct that there exists a reservoir of hostility to Islam among segments of the American population, such a cultural approach cannot sufficiently explain the variations in U.S. policy.

A third group of authors view U.S. policy on Islamist groups as neither a function of national interest nor culture, but instead as largely a consequence of the policymaking process itself.<sup>6</sup> In the case of the Brotherhood, according to Lorenzo Vidino, barriers to information sharing among government agencies, ignorance about Islam and Islamists, and elected officials’ reliance on Muslim constituencies largely explain the varying policy responses to Islamist groups.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that if

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National Security Answers from Inspectors General,” *Office of Michele Bachmann*, June 13, 2012. <http://bachmann.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=299447>

<sup>3</sup> Maria de Ceu Pinto, *Political Islam and the United States* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Graham E. Fuller and Ian O. Lesser, *A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Ahmed Moussalli, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Islamist Politics* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision* (New York: Longman, 1999). See also Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power and The Modern Presidents* (New York: Free Press, 1991 ed).

<sup>7</sup> Lorenzo Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 103-110. Gerges identifies three factors governing U.S. Islamist policy, two of which can be classified as bureaucratic. Gerges, *American and Political Islam*, pp. 227-228.

officials possessed better information, either because they were simply willing to learn more about Islamist groups, or because governments engineered better information-sharing policies, then a more unified Islamist policy would emerge.

While this approach provides a useful and interesting interpretation of Western policies toward political Islam, it is not wholly satisfying. While a general lack of knowledge often handicaps U.S. foreign policy, there is little evidence that policymakers are more ignorant about Islam than they are about other facets of national policy, either foreign or domestic. Islam is an especially public, and sometimes appalling, case, but, unfortunately, it is probably not a special one.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, there exists no consensus on the true nature of Islamist groups. While this debate was almost completely submerged during the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the proliferation of Islamist movements and the dramatic rise in their visibility during the 1990s kick-started a wide ranging and clamorous debate both inside and outside government. This debate resurfaced in the middle of George W. Bush's second term. Especially within the policymaking arena, these differing analytical perspectives on Islamist groups are reinforced and intensified by specific bureaucratic cultures and prerogatives.<sup>9</sup>

While the United States generally lacks a coherent and official policy toward Islamist groups, and there remains a sometimes thick (and occasionally justified) air of suspicion over Islamist groups, there are nonetheless discernible differences between administrations. The George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton Administrations generally pursued a reactive Islamist policy, dealing with the group only in response to developments on the ground, as in Algeria. Partly in response to the trauma of the 9/11 attacks, but also reflecting the composition of his national security team, the George W. Bush Administration kept Islamists at arm's length, allowing even the limited relationships his predecessors had established to decay. Barack Obama, on the other hand, began a cautious process of outreach based around his speech in Cairo in June 2009. This chapter supports Pinto's conclusion that "the greatest changes in U.S. policy occur when a new administration takes office bringing in a new foreign policy team."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Nakhleh argues that the CIA, for instance, has since the early 1990s produced sensitive, highly informed analyses of political Islam and distributed them to policymakers in the Executive and Legislative branches. Emile Nakhleh, *A Necessary Engagement: Reinventing America's Relations with the Muslim World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). Similarly, a State Department working group in the early 90s earned praise from a senior diplomat for its "nuanced and critical understanding of the Islamist phenomenon," Gerges, *American and Political Islam*, p. 89.

<sup>9</sup> Thus, an alternative reading of bureaucratic politics theory would suggest that it is instead the varying prerogatives of the federal government bureaucracies that create tension and prevent the creation of a coherent policy. For evidence of this regarding Islamists, see John Mintz and Douglas Farah, "In Search of Friends among the Foes," *The Washington Post*, September 11, 2004. Available online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A12823-2004Sep10.html>

<sup>10</sup> Maria de Ceu Pinto, *Political Islam and the United States* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1999), p. 37.

Theoretically, this demonstrates that while the strategic character of interests does not vary, the way that those interests are pursued can and often does vary widely. Presidents and their staffs are constrained by bureaucracies and domestic opinion (sometimes exercised through Congress, sometimes not), but they do have latitude to set their own policies. While this may seem uncontroversial, this chapter does follow other works that have re-focused on how the strategic choices of the president set policy.<sup>11</sup> The electoral successes of Islamist parties in Egypt and Tunisia, and the election of Mohammed Morsi in Egypt, have the potential to show the limits of presidential prerogatives when key national interests are perceived to be in jeopardy.

### **Cold War Allies**

The United States' first connections with political Islam were necessitated by the superpower politics of the Cold War. Across the globe, both the Soviet Union and the United States sought to gain clients of their own and weaken those of their opponents. In the Middle East, Egypt was the prize. In 1952, a marriage of convenience between the Brotherhood and the "Free Officers" overthrew the Egyptian King, dissolved the monarchy, and tossed the British out. As Gamal Abdel Nasser emerged as the leader of the new Egypt, both the United States and the Soviet Union attempted to woo him into their respective camps. Nasser, however, proved to be his own man and began to promulgate an assertive doctrine of Arab Nationalism.

As the United States sought to constrain Nasser's influence and circumscribe Soviet activity in the Middle East, it explored the possibility of using religion to highlight both communism's atheism and the affinity between the United States and the Middle East.<sup>12</sup> In addition to brokering alliances with the fundamentalist regime in Saudi Arabia, the U.S. government began to consider a relationship with Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

It seems likely that there were contacts between U.S. officials and the Brotherhood in Egypt, but there is little evidence to indicate the extent of the relationship. State Department employees in Egypt did display a widespread knowledge about the group. For instance, in a dispatch from the embassy in Cairo, a U.S. State Department staffer suggested inviting a member of the Brotherhood to a conference in the United States. The staffer noted that the Muslim Brother's expenses would be paid by the group itself, and cautioned his superiors to tread carefully "in light of the possible

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<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Peter Trubowitz, *Politics and Strategy: Partisan Ambition and American Statecraft* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> For a general study of how religion influenced the early Cold War strategy of the U.S., see William Inboden III, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective*, Philip Muehlenbeck, ed. (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012). Ian Johnson's *A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA, and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010) contains valuable and specific information on attempts to use religion in the Arab world. For a general history of the U.S.'s strategy against Nasser, see Salim Yaqoub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

effects of offending this important body.”<sup>13</sup> The Brotherhood official attended the conference, and even met with the President. There was, according to one Egyptian analyst, even a meeting between a U.S. Embassy official and Brotherhood founder Hasan al-Banna to discuss potential mutual efforts against communism, “but the gap in views proved too wide to bridge.”<sup>14</sup>

As to a more extensive relationship, there is very little beyond speculation. The author of an authoritative history of the Brotherhood artfully elides the question of whether the group accepted foreign (British) funding, and dismisses the idea that the Brotherhood ever acted on behalf of foreign powers as “hardly worth examining.”<sup>15</sup> However, Miles Copeland, the former CIA officer, writes that the Brotherhood “had been thoroughly penetrated, at the top, by the British, American, French, and Soviet intelligence services [...]”<sup>16</sup>

One of the more extensively researched episodes in this early relationship revolves around Muslim Brotherhood figure Said Ramadan (al-Banna’s son-in-law and father of European Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan). As chronicled by Ian Johnson, the CIA saw in the Brotherhood a potential lever against communism and worked to bolster Ramadan’s prominence, particularly among Europe-based Muslims. Drawing on interviews with former colleagues and associates of Bob Dreher, the CIA’s point man on the outreach, as well as reports from European intelligence agencies, Johnson concludes that “short of a CIA pay stub, every other indication points to the fact that Dreher and Amcomlib were using financial and political leverage to give the Brotherhood’s man in Europe (Said Ramadan) a leg up.”<sup>17</sup> However, as Cold War battlefields shifted East, and the 1967 defeat sucked the wind from Nasser’s sails, evidence of contacts between the Brotherhood and the U.S. dwindled.

For the remainder of the Cold War, there are accounts of episodic cooperation on other issues. For instance, according to senior Brotherhood member Essam el-Erian, during the Iranian hostage crisis, the Carter Administration asked then-Brotherhood General Guide Umar el-Telmessani to intercede with Ayatolla Khomeini to release the captives. The Brotherhood agreed on humanitarian

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<sup>13</sup> Jefferson Caffery, U.S. Embassy Cairo to U.S. Department of State, “Colloquium on Islamic Culture and Saeed Ramadan,” July 27, 1953. Available online at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB78/propaganda%20103.pdf>. Other State Department documents apparently display a similar familiarity with the organization. See Ziad Munson, “Islamic Mobilization: Islamic Social Movement Theory and the Muslim Brotherhood,” *Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (2001).

<sup>14</sup> Khalil al-Anani, “Is Brotherhood with America Possible?” *Arab Insight*, Spring 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993 ed), p. 182. Mitchell’s larger point is that the Brotherhood’s popularity was not due to any foreign machinations, real or imagined, but because the organization was a legitimate and popular expression of a large segment of Egyptian sentiment.

<sup>16</sup> Miles Copeland, *The Game of Nations* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), p. 184.

<sup>17</sup> Johnson, *A Mosque in Munich*, p. 128.



grounds and sought Anwar Sadat's approval for the request. However, when Telmessani traveled to Tehran, Khomeini reportedly refused to meet him.<sup>18</sup>

The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan offered a tantalizing way to utilize Islam to inflict damage on the Soviet Union. While there is speculation, much of it unfounded, on the relationship between the United States and the Afghan Arabs, there is no doubt that the Muslim Brotherhood's vast networks of contacts, institutions, and personalities played a critical role in the mobilization and logistics behind the Afghan jihad.<sup>19</sup> It appears that this division, between the Brotherhood's significant logistical and mobilization capabilities and the group's studied aversion to participating on the battlefield, presaged conflicts with American overtures. According to Egyptian analyst Khalil al-Anani, "the Americans wanted Anwar al-Sadat to get the Muslim Brotherhood to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan, but the Muslim Brotherhood was none too enthusiastic."<sup>20</sup>

### **U.S. Islamist Policy after the Cold War**

During the Cold War, abstract debates over Islamists' commitment to democracy or their position toward violence were largely overlooked (or overridden) in favor of discussions on how Islamist groups could be deployed to weaken the Soviet Union. However, soon after the fall of the Soviet Union events throughout the Islamic world forced the United States to consider these questions. Although the George H.W. Bush and Clinton Administrations tried to articulate a general vision towards Islamist groups, these policy pronouncements sounded vague and contradictory. Although these statements are commendable for their repeated insistence that the United States does not see Islam as an enemy and that terrorism is a religious, not Islamic, phenomenon, beneath the rhetoric these speeches betrayed unease at best toward Islamist groups' place in the post-Cold War Middle East.

The day after the Soviet Union's dissolution, Algerians voted for candidates from the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in the first round of Parliamentary elections, and the group stood poised to capture a comfortable majority in the upcoming second round. Before those elections could be held, however, on January 11, 1992 the Algerian military intervened to annul the results of the elections. Two months later, the FIS dissolved and the country tumbled into civil war. U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, in office during the coup, later reflected on the episode. "Generally speaking, when

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<sup>18</sup> Essam el-Erian, "al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn wa al-Idāra al-Amrikiyya al-Jadida...Hal min Jadid?" (The Muslim Brotherhood and the New American Administration...What's Really New?), *al-Hayat*, March 1, 2009. Available online at <http://islamtoday.net/bohooth/services/printart-19-109032.htm>. The incident is also noted, without citations, in Khalil al-Anani, "Is Brotherhood with America Possible?" *Arab Insight*, Spring 2007, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> See Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Militant Islam* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2002), p. 139.

<sup>20</sup> Khalil al-Anani, "Is Brotherhood with America Possible?" *Arab Insight*, Spring 2007, p. 12. I thank Dr. al-Anani for clarifying this point to me. Pargeter, presents evidence that there were some Brotherhood activists directly involved in the fighting. See Alison Pargeter, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Burden of Tradition* (London: Saqi, 2010), pp. 186-193.

you support democracy, you take what democracy gives you,” Baker mused. “If it gives you a radical Islamic fundamentalist, you’re supposed to live with it. We didn’t live with it in Algeria because we felt that the radical fundamentalists’ views were so adverse to what we believe in and what we support, and to what we understood the national interests of the United States to be.”<sup>21</sup>

The Algerian fiasco was only one in a series of political events that highlighted the growing prominence of Islamist groups. In Jordan, the Brotherhood had long participated in the country’s cramped political system, making significant gains in the 1989 elections and taking cabinet positions in 1991. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood had participated in parliamentary elections in 1984 and 1987, although the group had joined other opposition forces in boycotting the 1990 election. Newer Islamist groups had also begun to engage in politics. The Welfare Party in Turkey first participated in municipal elections in 1989, and sent 62 MPs to Parliament in the Fall 1991 general elections, while Hezbollah’s first foray into politics came in Lebanon’s Summer/Fall 1992 Parliamentary elections.

Late in the George H.W. Bush administration the American government began to articulate exactly how Islamists fit into U.S. foreign policy. Six months after the coup in Algeria, on June 2, 1992, Edward Djerejian, then serving as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, (in between stints as U.S. Ambassador to Syria (1988-1991) and Israel (1993) delivered a landmark speech on U.S. Middle East policy at Meridian House, a prominent conference center in Washington, D.C. As Djerejian explained in his memoir, he was “increasingly concerned that, in search of a new enemy, we would begin to define Islam as the next ‘-ism’ the United States would have to confront. Given my responsibilities for Near Eastern Affairs in the State Department, I thought it important for the U.S. government to begin to enunciate its assessment of the forces at play in the Middle East and its approach toward Muslim countries in general.”<sup>22</sup>

In this speech, which Robert Satloff calls “the founding text of U.S. official documents on Islam and Islamism,” Djerejian attempted to disabuse the audience of the notion that the United States had settled on Islam as next threat.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, however, Djerejian subtly signaled Washington’s hostility to Islamist movements, indirectly conjuring the specter of Algeria to argue “we are wary of those who would use the democratic process to come to power, only to destroy that very process in order to retain power and political dominance. We believe in the principle of one person, one vote. We do not support “one person, one vote, one time.”<sup>24</sup> However, Djerejian did not specify how

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<sup>21</sup> James A. Baker III, “Looking Back on the Middle East,” *The Middle East Quarterly*, September 1994. Cited in Jason Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention: The Politics of the U.S.-Egyptian Alliance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Edward P. Djerejian with William Martin, *Danger and Opportunity: An American Ambassador’s Journey Through the Middle East* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2008), p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Satloff, “U.S. Policy Towards Islamism: A Theoretical and Operational Overview,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2000, p. 6

<sup>24</sup> Two points can be made about Djerejian’s formulation. First, in the Algerian case it was the military, not the Islamists, who were responsible (with western acquiescence, if not encouragement) for cancelling

exactly these judgments would be made nor did he provide examples of specific parties that met, or did not meet, his criteria.

The Clinton Administration's emphasis on a strategy of democratic "enlargement" put the dilemma Djerejian articulated in starker relief.<sup>25</sup> As Clinton National Security Advisor Anthony Lake explained, in cases where the Administration was forced to choose between democracy and Islamists, democracy would lose out. Speaking at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in May of 1994, Lake argued that what set "Islamic Extremists" apart was their use of "religion to cover [their] real intentions—the naked pursuit of political power."<sup>26</sup> Lake's formulation suggested that it was not the method (the use of violence, for instance) that marked any particular Islamic group as extremist, it was the attempt to use religion to realize political goals.<sup>27</sup> This left Islamist groups with two options to win Washington's official favor: cease to be Islamic, or retreat into political quietism.<sup>28</sup>

As the above sketch shows, beyond a vague hostility, official U.S. statements toward Islamist groups during the period were largely distinguished by their generality and contradictions. Two general factors were responsible for the inability of the U.S. government to issue a more specific formal statement about Islamism. Primarily, it is an enduring characteristic that Islamist groups, even those that can trace their intellectual heritage back to the Muslim Brotherhood, are profoundly influenced by national conditions.<sup>29</sup> Because of this, articulating a single policy is not sufficient to cover the variety of Islamist organizations.

Secondly, the preeminence of national level conditions is mirrored in the U.S. government. The Foreign Service bureaucracy, and even much of the intelligence community, is organized along national lines. There are country "desks," but less attention is paid to transnational issues, especially

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democracy. Secondly, there has yet to be a case where an Islamist group has come to power via elections, then cancelled elections in order to remain in power. Among America's pre-Arab Spring clients, the more apt description has been "one man, no vote, never." Edward P. Djerejian, "The US and the Middle East in a Changing World," *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, June 8, 1992. Available online at [http://www.disam.dscamilitary.gov/pubs/Vol%2014\\_4/Djerejian.pdf](http://www.disam.dscamilitary.gov/pubs/Vol%2014_4/Djerejian.pdf). For a more positive reading of Djerejian's speech regarding Islamists, see Fawaz Gerges, *American and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 83-85.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement," Remarks at the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies, September 21, 1993. Available online at: [http://www.disam.dscamilitary.gov/pubs/Vol%2016\\_2/Lake.pdf](http://www.disam.dscamilitary.gov/pubs/Vol%2016_2/Lake.pdf). See also Bill Clinton, "Remarks at the 48<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York," September 27, 1993. Available online at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=47119#axzz1yFOwWQgs>.

<sup>26</sup> Anthony Lake, "Remarks at the Washington Institute's Soref Symposium," May 17, 1994.

<sup>27</sup> The formulation comes from Robert Satloff, "Islamism seen from Washington," in *The Islamism Debate*, Martin Kramer, ed. (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1997), p. 106.

<sup>28</sup> As Gerges put it, "on balance, the American foreign policy elite views the good Islamists as the ones who are apolitical." Gerges, *American and Political Islam*, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Robert S. Leiken and Steven Brooke, "The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2007. Available online at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/62453/robert-s-leiken-and-steven-brooke/the-moderate-muslim-brotherhood>.

ones such as political Islam, seen as relatively unimportant in the early 1990s.<sup>30</sup> This matters because it forces analysts and policymakers to accommodate local governments in their policies. For instance, Islamist groups in Jordan and Morocco are legal participants in the political process but illegal in Egypt (historically) and in Syria (currently). Thus, to grant legitimacy to an organization—for instance, by publicly mentioning it in a speech—may play differently in Cairo than in Amman.<sup>31</sup> Not only does the bureaucratic structure make it difficult to set an official policy, it makes it difficult to even communicate across units. Participants in debates over U.S. Islamist policies during the 1990s described the deliberations as “fractured, disorganized, and inconclusive.”<sup>32</sup>

It is also important to note, that despite the lack of a formally-articulated policy on Islamists, there were, throughout the 1990s, official, if low-level, contacts between U.S. officials and the Muslim Brotherhood. Multiple sources report that the U.S. government, particularly the State Department and CIA, began a dialogue with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt during the mid-1990s. Basing the account on “interviews with multiple participants, some now located at the White House and others at the State Department and CIA” Steve Coll argues that the U.S. Embassy in Cairo “reached out cautiously” to the Brotherhood, but “the dialogue never went very far.”<sup>33</sup>

Gerges claims that the contacts were part of a tentative attempt to assess potential post-Mubarak futures for Egypt, but were cut off over U.S. officials’ concerns that continuing the contacts would weaken the Mubarak regime, a pillar of American strategy in the region.<sup>34</sup> French scholar of Islam Gilles Kepel largely concurs.<sup>35</sup> When Mubarak discovered the outreach he was furious. In an interview with American journalist Mary Anne Weaver, Mubarak raged, “Your government is in contact with these *terrorists* [emphasis in the original] from the Muslim Brotherhood. This has all been done very secretly, without our knowledge at first. You think you can correct the mistakes that you made in Iran, where you had no contact with Ayatollah Khomeini and *his* fanatic groups before

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<sup>30</sup> Robert Satloff, “U.S. Policy Towards Islamism: A Theoretical and Operational Overview,” Council on Foreign Relations, 2000. Former top CIA political Islam analyst Emile Nakhleh says that it was only in 2004 when the CIA set up a Muslim World Unit in the CIA to study Islam and politics and society holistically, not as the purview of individual countries. Nakhleh, *A Necessary Engagement*, pp. 66-68.

<sup>31</sup> Jeremy Sharp, “U.S. Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: The Islamist Dilemma,” Congressional Research Service, June 15, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2011* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), pg. 259.

<sup>33</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, pp. 605 (n3) and 259, respectively. The contacts are also mentioned briefly in Nakhleh, *A Necessary Engagement*, p. 34 and Edward P. Djerejian with William Martin, *Danger and Opportunity: An American Ambassador’s Journey Through the Middle East* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2008), p. 50.

<sup>34</sup> Gerges, *American and Political Islam*, pp. 177-178, 109. Abdo’s sources, however, claim the meetings were intended to isolate extremists within the Islamist movement, ostensibly those from the Gama’a Islamiyya then terrorizing tourists and others with whom they disagreed. Geneive Abdo, *No God But God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 75-76.

<sup>35</sup> See Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Militant Islam* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2002), p. 366.

they seized power.”<sup>36</sup> U.S. officials, wary of alienating Mubarak or otherwise weakening a key client in the Middle East, vastly dialed the contacts back.<sup>37</sup>

### **Islamist Groups from the Bush Administration’s Perspective**

One immediate result of the 9/11 attacks was the removal of overt contact between Islamist groups and the U.S. government from the agenda. While the Brotherhood (along with a host of other Islamist groups, including Hamas), condemned the attack, the atmosphere became charged with suspicion. It did not help that leading U.S. policymakers appeared to send mixed signals about the Brotherhood. For instance, three months after the attacks, Vice President Dick Cheney (mistakenly) claimed that the Muslim Brotherhood had a hand in the 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.<sup>38</sup> While Muslim Brotherhood organizations protested the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, members were also nervous of being officially labeled a terrorist organization and, thus, lumped in with the jihadists.

However it was only in response to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in early 2003 that most Islamist organizations officially ceased contacts with the United States.<sup>39</sup> The result was that, even in those countries (like Morocco and Jordan) where there had been collegial relations historically between the U.S. and Islamist parties, there was little contact for the remainder of the Bush Administration.<sup>40</sup> A November 2009 dispatch from the U.S. embassy in Amman straightforwardly notes that: “The Embassy has begun a quiet yet deliberate process of reestablishing contacts with Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood (JMB) and the Islamic Action Front political party, relationships that have languished since September 11, 2001.”<sup>41</sup>

The Bush Administration’s policy of refusing contact continued even as the Administration began to loudly trumpet its democracy promotion agenda. For instance, even at the height of Bush’s emphasis on democracy promotion, when Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice travelled to Cairo to speak about the need for democratic reform in the Arab World, and Egypt in particular, she denied contacts between the U.S. and the Brotherhood. Responding to an audience member’s question

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<sup>36</sup> Mary Anne Weaver, *A Portrait of Egypt: A Journey through the World of Militant Islam* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999), p. 165.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Kurtzer, U.S. Ambassador to Egypt from 1997-2001 notes that during his time in Cairo he met with “various Islamist figures affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood outside of the Embassy, but had not met any official Brotherhood figures.” Manal Lutfi, “The Brotherhood and America, Part 1,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 12, 2007. Available online at <http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?id=8286>.

<sup>38</sup> Richard B. Cheney, interview with Jim Angle, *Fox News*, December 11, 2001. Available online at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=85609#axzz1yZIEhJQ3>.

<sup>39</sup> Manal Lutfi, “The Brotherhood and America, Part 1,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 12, 2007. Available online at <http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?id=8286>.

<sup>40</sup> Some evidence suggests that there was dissention in the administration over this issue. See John Mintz and Douglas Farah, “In Search of Friends Among the Foes,” *The Washington Post*, September 11, 2004. Available online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A12823-2004Sep10.html>

<sup>41</sup> “Jordan: Political Engagement Furthers Cairo Speech Goals,” 09AMMAN2516, November 18, 2009. Accessed via wikileaks, available online at: <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09AMMAN2516.html>

after her speech at the American University of Cairo, the Secretary asserted, "we have not engaged with the Muslim Brotherhood. And we won't."<sup>42</sup> The secretary fell back on Egyptian law (the Brotherhood was formally illegal) to defend her position: "Egypt has its laws, it has its rule of law, and I'll respect that."<sup>43</sup>

Ironically, during this time the Egyptian Brotherhood was attempting to reengage with the Bush Administration, starting an initiative entitled "Reintroducing the Brotherhood to the West."<sup>44</sup> There were two specific items on the group's agenda. First, the group hoped to spur the Bush Administration (as well as the European nations) to be more vocal about the human and civil rights violations the Mubarak government committed against the group, in the same way the West would often bring up the abuse of secular activists. Secondly, some in the Brotherhood worried that they would potentially be designated a terrorist organization.<sup>45</sup>

As part of the general outreach, prominent Brotherhood member Khairat al-Shater penned an op-ed in *the Guardian*. Tellingly entitled "No Need to Be Afraid of Us," al-Shater used the column to argue the group's democratic bona fides, telling his western audience that the Brotherhood "believe[s] that the domination of political life by a single political party or group, whether the ruling party, the Muslim Brotherhood or any other, is not desirable: the only result of such a monopoly is the alienation of the majority of the people."<sup>46</sup> Another part of the strategy included creating an official English-language website, [www.ikhwanweb.com](http://www.ikhwanweb.com), to disseminate information about the group and increase contact with western researchers.

The election of Hamas in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections completely submerged these attempts. The election was widely considered free and fair, and there was even a period, a "millisecond," according to a senior State Department official, where the United States considered letting the election run its course to see how Hamas would respond. Instead, the United States settled on a policy that convinced many across the Middle East that American rhetoric on democracy masked the same old policies. Working in concert with Arab allies, including Egypt and Jordan, the U.S. backed Fatah strongman Mahmud Dahlan and encouraged him to confront Hamas and hopefully dislodge them from government. The plan backfired when Hamas preemptively

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<sup>42</sup> Joshua Stacher, "An Interpretation of Rice's Policy Speech at AUC," *Arabist Blog*, June 20, 2005. Available online at <http://www.arabist.net/blog/2005/6/20/an-interpretation-of-rices-policy-speech-at-auc.html>. It is likely, however, that the low-level contacts between the Brotherhood and the United States continued sporadically through the Bush Administration, albeit to a lesser degree than under Clinton and Obama.

<sup>43</sup> Ken Silverstein, "Parties of God: The Bush Doctrine and the Rise of Islamic Democracy," *Harpers*, March 2007. Available online at <http://www.harpers.org/archive/2007/03/0081425>

<sup>44</sup> Shadi Hamid, "The Rise of the Islamists," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2011. Available online at [http://pomed.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Rise-of-the-Islamists\\_May-June20111.pdf](http://pomed.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Rise-of-the-Islamists_May-June20111.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> The initiative also roughly coincided with the group's impressive performance in the 2005 Parliamentary elections, where it won 88 seats.

<sup>46</sup> Khairat el-Shatir, "No Need to Be Afraid of Us," *The Guardian*, November 22, 2005. Available online at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/nov/23/comment.mainsection>.

attacked Dahlan's forces and, after a brief period of fighting, routed them.<sup>47</sup> Whatever the assurances emanating from Washington, the Hamas fiasco showed that, as in Algeria, policymakers were determined to destroy democracy in order to save it.

However even while the Bush Administration was plotting with its Arab allies to overthrow Hamas, it was tacitly encouraging Muslim Brotherhood groups in Iraq and Syria. These episodes, particularly in Syria, show how the Bush Administration was not averse to working with Islamist groups in the service of broader strategic goals. In these cases, Sunni Islamist groups were well positioned to apply pressure to Iranian allies in Damascus and Baghdad.

While Syria had dodged inclusion on President Bush's infamous "Axis of Evil" in the 2002 State of the Union address, the regime's alliance with *bête noire* Iran, support for the Iraq insurgency and continued support for Israeli foes Hamas and Hezbollah put Damascus squarely in Washington's sights. In late 2006, the *New York Times* revealed that certain members of the Bush Administration had explored options for toppling Bashar al-Assad, which included "hearing what [the Muslim Brotherhood] has to say" and meeting with the National Salvation Front, an umbrella group which counted the Syrian Muslim Brothers among its prominent members. Other administration officials had travelled to Syria to meet activists "with close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood" (membership in the Brotherhood is a capital offense in Syria and, at that time, the group was completely underground).<sup>48</sup> A year later, citing a retired CIA official, Seymour Hersh wrote that "The Americans have provided both political and financial support [to the NSF]. The Saudis are taking the lead with financial support, but there is American involvement."<sup>49</sup> Across the border, the Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya*) joined with the pro-American March 14 alliance against the March 8 alliance, which included Hezbollah and was seen as pro-Syrian/Iranian.

In Iraq, the Bush Administration supported including the Iraqi Islamic Party, with roots in the Muslim Brotherhood, in the post-Saddam government. Tareq al-Hashemi, then leader of the party and vice president of Iraq, frequently met with President Bush and top officials (continuing into the Obama Administration), to the consternation of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood members.<sup>50</sup> As a 2007 report in *al-Sharq al-Awsat* claimed, "there is significant communication and deliberations between Americans and the MB members who participate in Iraq's present government and who also considerably engage in civil life—Iraq's MB group are the only ones who have their own

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<sup>47</sup> This account is taken from David Rose, "The Gaza Bombshell," *Vanity Fair*, April 2008. Available online at <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2008/04/gaza200804>.

<sup>48</sup> Farah Stockman, "U.S. Building Ties with Assad Opponents in Syria," *The New York Times*, November 26, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> Seymour Hersh, "The Redirection: Is the Administration's New Policy Benefitting Our Enemies in the War on Terrorism?" *The New Yorker*, March 5, 2007. Available online at [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/03/05/070305fa\\_fact\\_hersh?currentPage=all](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/03/05/070305fa_fact_hersh?currentPage=all). See also Manal Lutfi, "The Brotherhood and America, Part 2" *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 13, 2007. Available online at <http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=3&id=8297>.

<sup>50</sup> Manal Lutfi, "The Brotherhood and America, Part 4," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 15, 2007. Available online at <http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=3&id=8297>.

television channel, Baghdad satellite channel.”<sup>51</sup> As in Syria, the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood could serve as a valuable counterweight to expanding Iranian influence.

### **The Moderation Debate, Revisited**

While the Bush Administration kept Islamist movements largely on the sidelines, throughout 2006 and 2007 a series of articles appeared which advocated greater engagement between Washington and Islamist movements, particularly in the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.<sup>52</sup> On one side were those arguing that the United States should expand efforts to engage with Islamist groups and bring more pressure on Middle Eastern regimes to democratize. These advocates of greater dialogue were countered by those who argued that the United States needed to maintain a posture of hostility towards Islamist movements while increasing security and intelligence cooperation with Middle Eastern clients to fortify them against the Islamist challenge.

#### *The Accommodationists*<sup>53</sup>

In 2007, a series of articles on Islamist groups appeared in leading American publications. While positing slightly different arguments, Shadi Hamid in *Democracy*, Robert S. Leiken and Steven Brooke in *Foreign Affairs*, Marc Lynch in *Foreign Policy*, James Traub in *The New York Times*, and Ken Silverstein in *Harpers* all recommended a similar course of action: the Bush Administration needed to seriously consider deepening contacts with Islamists. While all the articles drew on extended conversations with Islamists in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and elsewhere, what separated these reports from prior articles was that each appeared in mainstream outlets, including *Foreign Affairs*, the flagship journal of the Council on Foreign Relations.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Manal Lutfi, “The Brotherhood and America, Part 2,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 13, 2007. Available online at <http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=3&id=8297>.

<sup>52</sup> These arguments, and the debates that followed, bore more than a passing resemblance to controversies from the 1990s. For an analysis of these earlier debates, see Maria de Ceu Pinto, *Political Islam and the United States* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1999); Fawaz Gerges, *American and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Leon T. Hadar, “The Green Peril: Creating the Islamic Fundamentalist Threat,” CATO Policy Analysis No. 177 (August 27, 1992). Available online at <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-177.html>. John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). See also the following conference reports: *Islamic Activism and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Scott W. Hibbard and David Little, eds. (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1997) and *The Islamism Debate*, Martin Kramer, ed. (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1997).

<sup>53</sup> Both de Ceu Pinto and Gerges characterize the sides in the debates as “accommodationists” and “confrontationalists.” See Maria de Ceu Pinto, *Political Islam and the United States* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1999), pg. 165 and Fawaz Gerges, *American and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chapter 2.

<sup>54</sup> Shadi Hamid, “Parting the Veil,” *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, Summer 2007. Available online at <http://www.democracyjournal.org/5/6533.php?page=all>. Leiken and Brooke, “The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2007. Available online at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/62453/robert-s-leiken-and-steven-brooke/the-moderate-muslim-brotherhood>. Marc Lynch, “The FP Memo: Brothers in Arms,” *Foreign Policy*, August 15, 2007. Available



The authors' generally deployed three types of arguments based on pragmatism, the ideological transformation of Islamist groups, or on national security grounds.<sup>55</sup> Often, these arguments overlapped. The first cast the choice to engage Islamists as simple pragmatism. Islamists are powerful and well-entrenched, and have to be accounted for in formulating policy initiatives toward the Muslim World. As Hamid put it, "Only Islamists have the mobilizing capacity and grassroots support to pressure Middle Eastern regimes to democratize. Thus, in not engaging groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, the United States cuts itself off from large constituencies whose participation is vital to the process of political change."<sup>56</sup> For Graham Fuller, a former CIA official, the Brotherhood "is the preeminent movement in the Muslim world."<sup>57</sup> Leiken and Brooke likewise suggest that the Brotherhood plays a far larger and more significant role in Middle Eastern societies than do "liberal" Muslim groups historically favored by the West.<sup>58</sup>

Another facet of accommodationists' arguments is that while Islamist groups may not be liberals, they have accepted the basic precepts of electoral democracy (these arguments, implicitly or explicitly, reject Djerejian's dilemma).<sup>59</sup> As Silverstein argues, "The new Islamic movements are popularly based and endorse free elections, the rotation of power, freedom of speech, and other concepts that are scorned by the regimes that currently hold power. Islamist groups have peacefully

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online at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2007/08/15/the\\_fp\\_memo\\_brothers\\_in\\_arms](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2007/08/15/the_fp_memo_brothers_in_arms). Ken Silverstein, "Parties of God: The Bush Doctrine and the Rise of Islamic Democracy," *Harpers*, March 2007. Available online at <http://www.harpers.org/archive/2007/03/0081425>. James Traub, "Islamic Democrats?" *The New York Times Magazine*, April 29, 2007. Available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/29/magazine/29Brotherhood.t.html?pagewanted=all>. See also Nathan Brown, Amr Hamzawy, and Marina Ottaway, *Islamic Movements and the Democratic Process in the Arab World: Exploring the Grey Zones*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace/Herbert Quandt Stiftung, March 2006. Available online at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/CP67.Brown.FINAL.pdf>. Importantly, see the official response by Abdul Moneim Abu El-Foutouh, a then-member of the Muslim Brotherhood's guidance council, to the questions that Brown et al posed: [http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/FutouhEnglishFullText\\_\\_5\\_.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/FutouhEnglishFullText__5_.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> A secondary assumption is that that U.S. outreach to Islamist groups is necessary given the inherently unstable nature of Middle Eastern regimes. At some point in the future these regimes will give way, and it is important for the United States to have an idea of potentially important players, and potentially familiar interlocutors, in subsequent governments.

<sup>56</sup> Shadi Hamid, "Parting the Veil," *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, Summer 2007. Available online at <http://www.democracyjournal.org/5/6533.php?page=all>.

<sup>57</sup> John Mintz and Douglas Farah, "In Search of Friends Among the Foes," *The Washington Post*, September 11, 2004. Available online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A12823-2004Sep10.html>

<sup>58</sup> Leiken and Brooke, "The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2007.

<sup>59</sup> These debates hinge on whether one believes democracy should be defined procedurally (rotation of power, elections, etc...) or attitudinally (liberalism). Essentially, if democracy is defined procedurally, then the ideational content of the actors is largely irrelevant, and you can have "democracy without democrats." If democracy is defined ideationally, then actors must possess liberal values in addition to adhering to procedures. For the democracy-as-procedure idea, see Dankwart A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Towards a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 2 No. 3 (1970). For this argument applied to religious parties and democracy, see Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996). For the democracy-as-liberalism idea, see Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino, eds. *Assessing the Quality of Democracy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

accepted electoral defeat, even when it was obvious that their governments had engaged in gross fraud to assure their hold on power. In parliaments, Islamists have not focused on implementing theocracy or imposing shari'ah but have instead fought for political and social reforms, including government accountability.<sup>60</sup> These arguments are supported by Mona El-Ghobashy's more academic take on ideological and organizational change in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>61</sup>

The third accommodationist argument, spurred on by 9/11, posits the following: the United States should explore engaging with Islamist groups not because they may or may not be democrats, but because by rejecting violence as a method of sociopolitical change they can help isolate more violent elements such as al Qaeda. More generally, this argument rejects Lake's criteria for extremism by explicitly judging Islamist groups on what they do, rather than what they are. As Leiken and Brooke argue, "Jihadists loathe the Muslim Brotherhood...for rejecting global jihad and embracing democracy. These positions seem to make them moderates, the very thing the United States, short on allies in the Muslim world, seeks."<sup>62</sup> In a later piece, Hamid and Brooke explicitly connect democracy promotion, engagement with Islamists, and marginalization of jihadists.<sup>63</sup>

Two basic policy recommendations flowed from the accommodationists' analysis. First, the United States should begin a process of reaching out to Islamist groups that have rejected violence. While the precise mechanics of "engagement" are often unspecified, the idea generally includes the United States beginning a formal dialogue with Islamist groups, both listening to their arguments and communicating the official U.S. position. This dialogue will also force Islamist groups to articulate clearly their positions and move from generally vague platforms to concrete policy ideas, providing the United States with information about these groups. Secondly, this dialogue will grant legitimacy and support to non-violent Islamists, further sidelining jihadist groups.

The United States should, at the same time, encourage its regional allies to implement serious democratic reforms, including (but not limited to) allowing non-violent Islamists into the political process. The United States should also take a much more vocal stand whenever Islamists are persecuted and arrested without cause. Traditionally, the United States has been willing to publicly raise the issue of the detention of secular figures (Ayman Nour, for instance) but ignore similar

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<sup>60</sup> Ken Silverstein, "Parties of God: The Bush Doctrine and the Rise of Islamic Democracy," *Harpers*, March 2007. Available online at <http://www.harpers.org/archive/2007/03/0081425>. For an earlier, albeit slightly stronger version of this same argument, see John O. Voll and John L. Esposito, "Islam's Democratic Essence," *Middle East Quarterly*, September 1994. Available online at <http://www.meforum.org/151/islams-democratic-essence>

<sup>61</sup> Mona El-Ghobashy, "The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (2005).

<sup>62</sup> Leiken and Brooke, "The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2007. See also Marc Lynch, "Jihadis and the Ikhwan," in Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman eds., *Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions with al-Qa'ida and its Periphery* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2010)

<sup>63</sup> Shadi Hamid and Steven Brooke, "Promoting Democracy to Stop Terror, Revisited," *Policy Review*, February 1, 2010. Available online at <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/5285>.

actions against Islamist figures. This silence was justified with arguments that the United States refused to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries.

There were some public indications that the Bush administration was taking seriously some of these recommendations.<sup>64</sup> Most prominently, during the same time in which these articles were published, two prominent democratic congressmen, including David Price and House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, met publicly with Muslim Brotherhood officials. The key interlocutor on the Brotherhood side was Saad el-Katany, then head of the Brotherhood's parliamentary bloc (and now Speaker of Parliament), who kept in regular contact with the U.S. Embassy's political office.<sup>65</sup> However, these arguments failed to filter through to the level of policy during the Bush Administration.

### *The Confrontationalists*

The accommodationists' recommendations did not go unchallenged, and critics began to argue that instead of engagement, Washington needed to not only avoid dialogue with Islamist groups, all such organizations should be treated as actively hostile to the United States. In 2007 Mitt Romney, then in his first run as a presidential candidate, answered a question about Osama bin Laden by arguing that the United States should target the Muslim Brotherhood: "I don't want to buy into the Democratic pitch that this is all about one person (bin Laden) because after we get him, there's going to be another and another... This is about Hezbollah and Hamas and al Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood. This is a worldwide jihadist effort to try and cause the collapse of all moderate Islamic governments and replace them with a caliphate... It's more than Osama bin Laden."<sup>66</sup>

As Romney's argument shows, a key feature of the confrontationalist argument is that there is no point in differentiating between Islamist groups on the basis of their attitudes towards violence. The identity of these groups, as Islamists, is sufficient to set them at odds with the United States. Such a "culturalist" approach to understanding Muslim behavior has a long pedigree, but received a boost with Samuel Huntington's publication of "the Clash of Civilizations" in the summer 1993. Although Huntington's argument has often been caricatured, his central contention is that in the

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<sup>64</sup> Johnson's argument that from around 2005 onwards the CIA was "backing the Brotherhood" in Europe is likely overwrought, but he does reference two CIA reports from 2006 and 2008 on the Brotherhood in Europe, one of which concludes "MB-related groups offer an alternative to more violent Islamic movements," in line with the accommodationists' arguments. Ian Johnson, *A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA, and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010), p. 227.

<sup>65</sup> There are also references in the cables to "other MB sources," suggesting that there were more extensive contacts between the U.S. and the group. "Egypt: New Round of MB Arrests," 10CAIRO197, February 11, 2010. Accessed via wikileaks, available online at <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/02/10CAIRO197.html>. "Updates on Reports of Divisions within the Muslim Brotherhood," 09CAIRO2011, October 21, 2009. Accessed via wikileaks, available online at <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/10/09CAIRO2011.html>. "MB Parliamentary Leader on Increased GOE Pre-Election Pressure," 09CAIRO 1493, August 3, 2009. Accessed via wikileaks, available online at <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/08/09CAIRO1493.html>

<sup>66</sup> "Republican Presidential Candidates Debate at the Ronald Reagan Library and Museum in Simi Valley, CA," The American Presidency Project, May 3, 2007. Available online at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=74350#axzz1tbSfYUZR>

post-Cold War era more and more individuals will look to entrenched, primordial identities (such as religion) to guide behavior. In terms of Islamist groups, this means that there is no use distinguishing violent from non-violent groups—these are simply tactical differences. As Daniel Pipes argues, the Brotherhood “is deeply hostile to the United States and must be treated as one vital component of the enemy’s assault force.”<sup>67</sup> More breathlessly, Youssef Ibrahim warns “splitting hairs by arguing that Osama kills in the name of God and a pie-in-the-sky heavenly caliphate while the more pragmatic Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood) are trying to rule on earth will make little difference to those who will be in the mass graves.”<sup>68</sup>

Because Islamists act on the basis of identity and are essentially impervious to ordinary political incentives and consequences, in power they would be implacable opponents of the United States. Quandt echoes the apprehension surrounding what Islamists may do in power: “the achievements of the past could be lost if, for example, the regime in Egypt changed suddenly [or] if radical Islamic movements gained ground.”<sup>69</sup> The accommodationists counter that while some portion of Islamists’ policies will surely run counter to U.S. national interests, Islamists will have to compromise and accommodate realities on the ground. As Norton, a longtime observer of Islamist groups, argues “life is constrained by practical realities. The question of the Brotherhood’s intentions is interesting to discuss over coffee, but it’s not a real question. There are structural constraints regarding what they could do, including what the army would allow and what the public would tolerate.”<sup>70</sup>

As in the first approach, confrontationalist policies are a logical consequence of the diagnosis. The core policy prescription of this current is to dramatically reinforce key U.S. pillars in the region. Regional clients should, therefore, not be chastised for violations of human rights or subjected to public criticism of their domestic policies. Islamists must be countered aggressively, ensuring the continuation of U.S. primacy via intelligence cooperation and security and military assistance. As Satloff argues, Islamists only win when the state falters:

Islamist movements rarely, if ever, “win”; rather, regimes lose—they give up, lose allies, seek an early compromise, or the like. Conversely, the successful defense of regimes against Islamist challenges

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<sup>67</sup> Daniel Pipes, “The Islamic States of America?” *FrontpageMagazine.com*, September 30, 2004. Available online at <http://www.danielpipes.org/2100/the-islamic-states-of-america>.

<sup>68</sup> Youssef Ibrahim, “The Moderate Path is Just Another Road to Disaster,” *New York Sun*, March 12, 2007. Available online at <http://www.nysun.com/foreign/moderate-path-is-just-another-road-to-disaster/50251/>.

<sup>69</sup> William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), p. 418. Quoted in Gerges, *American and Political Islam*, p. 187. On the general importance of Egypt for U.S. strategy in the Middle East, see Jason Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention: The Politics of the U.S.-Egyptian Alliance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>70</sup> Ken Silverstein, “Parties of God: The Bush Doctrine and the Rise of Islamic Democracy,” *Harpers*, March 2007. Available online at <http://www.harpers.org/archive/2007/03/0081425>.

has been largely a factor of the strength, backbone, and will of the regime, not the lack of support, ingenuity, or determination on the part of the Islamists.<sup>71</sup>

A subsidiary of this approach is a general skepticism of the utility of promoting democracy in the Middle East (whose immediate beneficiaries would be Islamist groups). This policy recommendation occasionally creates tension when individuals who are ostensibly dedicated to promoting democracy find themselves supporting authoritarian regimes, or attempting to topple democratically-elected governments (as in the Palestinian Territories). Joshua Muravchik illustrated this tension when he argued that engaging with the Muslim Brotherhood means abandoning democracy and “mak[ing] our peace with powerful indigenous forces.”<sup>72</sup>

The confrontationalist perspective also aligns with foreign governments, who encourage the U.S. government (both publicly and privately) to maintain its hard line towards Islamist movements. Not coincidentally, this would also keep the aid dollars flowing to the regimes themselves. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Arab regimes generally tried to use their own violent, internal insurrections to reorient their relations with the United States. Particularly, these regimes attempted to connect non-violent Islamists to the jihadists seeking to topple the governments. As Egypt’s Interior Minister explained, “They (terrorists) all came out from under the turban of the Muslim Brotherhood.” As reporter Youssef Ibrahim went on to summarize, the stance was “widely echoed by security officials in Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan and Morocco, all of whom are preoccupied by a continuing battle against terrorism.”<sup>73</sup> Despite Islamist attempts to separate themselves—in both word and deed—from their violent counterparts, the regimes persisted in making the connection.<sup>74</sup>

The 9/11 attacks and American involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan cemented these relationships. As Brownlee shows, throughout the 1990s the U.S.-Egyptian strategic relationship began to shift from one with the military at its core to a more low-profile set of interactions based on intelligence and counterterrorism cooperation. Whereas the United States once needed Egyptian tanks to face down threats of a Soviet push into the Middle East, during the 1990s, and especially after 9/11, the

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<sup>71</sup> Robert Satloff, “U.S. Policy Towards Islamism: A Theoretical and Operational Overview,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2000, p. 16. A similar sentiment is expressed by Martin Kramer, “The Mismeasure of Political Islam,” in *The Islamism Debate*, Martin Kramer, ed. (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1997), pp. 168-170.

<sup>72</sup> Joshua Muravchik, “More on the Muslim Brotherhood,” *Commentary Blog*, April 13, 2007. Available online at <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2007/04/13/more-on-the-muslim-brotherhood/>. It is, of course, unclear how one could have democracy while sidelining “powerful indigenous forces.”

<sup>73</sup> Youssef M. Ibrahim, “Twin Towers: Terrorism: Throughout Arab World, 20 Years of Growth of Islamic Terror Groups,” *The New York Times*, March 6, 1993. Available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/03/06/nyregion/twin-towers-terrorism-throughout-arab-world-20-years-growth-islamic-terror.html?ref=muslimbrotherhoodegypt>

<sup>74</sup> Jason Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention: The Politics of the U.S.- Egyptian Alliance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

United States needed Egypt's intelligence networks and torture chambers.<sup>75</sup> As a former CIA officer described the relationship, America's clients "know the language they need to speak to ensure our continued support, so they raise the Islamist threat and we fall for it, because we want their counterterrorism cooperation. That has trumped the idea of democracy."<sup>76</sup>

Throughout the second part of the 2000s, Egyptian officials began rolling out a new line of argument, attempting to paint the Brotherhood as an Iranian cat's paw in discussions with American government officials. This would allow the Brotherhood to again be folded into a broadly-defined basket of American enemies in the region. A cable from the U.S. Embassy in Cairo in advance of Mubarak's spring 2009 visit to Washington summarized the Egyptian view: "Mubarak and his advisors are now convinced that Tehran is working to weaken Egypt through creation of Hizballah cells, support of the Muslim Brotherhood, and destabilization of Gaza."<sup>77</sup> Two months later, in a meeting with Gen. David Petraeus, Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman again raised the issue of Iranian support for the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>78</sup> Even as protests roiled Tahrir square, Mubarak insisted to U.S. officials that they were the work of the Brotherhood and Iran.<sup>79</sup>

These regimes also held great importance for the way they preserved Israel's hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean. If these regimes fell, subsequent governments would be less likely to continue this relationship. Thus, Israeli officials and various self-styled "pro-Israel" commentators have added their voices to the confrontationalists, arguing that Islamist movements be staunchly opposed.<sup>80</sup> As with the Arab regimes, Israeli officials have tried to tie Israel's ongoing struggle against terrorism with the terrorism facing the United States.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Jason Brownlee, "Unrequited Moderation: Credible Commitments and State Repression in Egypt," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 45 No. 4 (2010).

<sup>76</sup> Ken Silverstein, "Parties of God: The Bush Doctrine and the Rise of Islamic Democracy," *Harpers*, March 2007. Available online at <http://www.harpers.org/archive/2007/03/0081425>

<sup>77</sup> Accessed via wikileaks, available online at "Scenesetter: President Mubarak's Visit to Washington," 09CAIRO874, May 19, 2009. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/05/09CAIRO874.html>

<sup>78</sup> "General Petraeus' Meeting with EGIS Chief Soliman," 09CAIRO1349, July 14, 2009. Accessed via wikileaks, available online at <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/07/09CAIRO1349.html>. See also "A/S Posner Presses GOE Officials on Emergency Law," 10CAIRO235, February 23, 2010. Accessed via wikileaks, available online at <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/02/10CAIRO235.html>

<sup>79</sup> Mark Landler, Helene Cooper, and David E. Sanger, "Policy Rift Muddled U.S. Signals About the Departure of Mubarak," *The New York Times*, February 13, 2011.

<sup>80</sup> On a particularly noxious segment of these self-styled "pro-Israel" commentators, see Wajhat Ali, Eli Clifton, Matthew Duss, Lee Fang, Scott Keyes, and Faiz Shakir, "Fear Inc.: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America," *Center for New American Progress*, August 2011, [www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/08/pdf/islamophobia.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/08/pdf/islamophobia.pdf)

In Israel, the discourse on engaging Islamist groups is significantly more diverse than self-proclaimed "pro-Israel" supporters in the U.S. would suggest. See, for instance, Laura Rozen, "Israel's Mossad, Out of the Shadows," *Mother Jones Blog*, February 19, 2008, at <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2008/02/israels-mossad-out-shadows>.

<sup>81</sup> On this issue, see generally John Mearsheimer and Steven Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007). For Israeli positions on Islamists, see Gerges, *American and Political*

While Israeli government officials generally kept a low profile during the Arab Spring, behind the scenes they were pressuring the United States to declare outright support for Mubarak's regime for fear of what might come after.<sup>82</sup> Israel's former Ambassador in Cairo darkly intoned, "The only people in Egypt who are committed to peace are the people in Mubarak's inner circle, and if the next president is not one of them, we are going to be in trouble."<sup>83</sup> As a *New York Times* report summarized, "supporters of Israel in the United States have been focusing on playing up the dangers they see as inherent in a democratic Egyptian government that contains, or is led by, elements of the now-banned Muslim Brotherhood. [...] Mrs. Clinton and some of her State Department subordinates wanted to move cautiously, and reassure allies they were not being abandoned, in part influenced by daily calls from Israel, Saudi Arabia and others who feared an Egypt without Mr. Mubarak would destabilize the entire region."<sup>84</sup> In the aftermath of the protests, in November 2011, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu argued that the Arab Spring had been a fundamentally "Islamic, anti-Western, anti-liberal, anti-Israeli, undemocratic wave."<sup>85</sup>

### The Obama Approach

Barack Obama arrived in office January 2009 pledging to renew relations between the United States and the rest of the world. In the Middle East, this pledge began with a June 2009 address in Cairo optimistically titled "a new beginning." In that speech, Obama noted that "America respects the right of all peaceful and law-abiding voices to be heard around the world, even if we disagree with them. And we will welcome all elected, peaceful governments—provided they govern with respect for all their people."<sup>86</sup> This passage, according to *Washington Post* journalist David Ignatius, was

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*Islam*, pp. 52-54. In 2008, Netanyahu ventured that the 9/11 attacks had benefitted Israel in the sense that they had made American's sympathetic to Israel's concerns about terrorism. "Report: Netanyahu Says 9/11 Terror Attacks Good For Israel," *Ha'aretz*, April 16, 2008, at <http://www.haaretz.com/news/report-netanyahu-says-9-11-terror-attacks-good-for-israel-1.244044>.

<sup>82</sup> Mark Landler and Helene Cooper, "Mideast Allies Favor Stability over Immediate Change in Egypt, Diplomats Tell U.S.," *The New York Times*, February 9, 2011. AIPAC offered "talking points" about the Muslim Brotherhood on their website, reflecting the "confrontationalist" view: [http://www.aipac.org/~media/Publications/Policy%20and%20Politics/AIPAC%20Analyses/Issue%20Memos/2011/02/FAQs\\_The\\_Muslim\\_Brotherhood.pdf](http://www.aipac.org/~media/Publications/Policy%20and%20Politics/AIPAC%20Analyses/Issue%20Memos/2011/02/FAQs_The_Muslim_Brotherhood.pdf)

<sup>83</sup> Ethan Bronner, "Israel Shaken as Turbulence Rocks an Ally," *The New York Times*, January 21, 2011. See also Yossi Klein Halevi, "Israel: Alone Again?" *The New York Times*, February 2, 2011; Herb Keinon, "Israel's Critics Begin to Open Up About Washington's 'Abandonment' of Mubarak," *The Jerusalem Post*, February 1, 2011.

<sup>84</sup> Mark Landler, Helene Cooper, and David E. Sanger, "Policy Rift Muddled U.S. Signals about the Departure of Mubarak," *The New York Times*, February 13, 2011. See also Helene Cooper and Mark Landler, "U.S. Trying to Balance Israel's Needs in the Face of Egyptian Reform," *The New York Times*, February 5, 2011.

<sup>85</sup> "Netanyahu Attacks Nature of Arab Spring's Discontent," *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 26, 2011, at <http://www.smh.com.au/world/netanyahu-attacks-nature-of-arab-springs-discontent-20111125-1nz8i.html>

<sup>86</sup> "Remarks by the President on a New Beginning," Cairo, Egypt, June 4, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09>

specifically crafted for the Muslim Brotherhood—and, by extension, Islamists across the region.<sup>87</sup> In stark contrast to the previous Administration, the Obama Administration invited ten members of the Brotherhood’s parliamentary bloc to the speech.<sup>88</sup>

There are also indications that the rhetoric was translated into action. In Morocco, the U.S. Embassy held meetings with Islamists, noting in a cable that the outreach “represents part of a wider Mission Morocco initiative—in keeping with the momentum and the new tone characterized in the President's Cairo Speech—to widen our contacts with Moroccan Islamists and others who have traditionally taken hostile stances toward U.S. policy.”<sup>89</sup> Likewise, in the wake of the Cairo speech, the U.S. Embassy in Jordan also increased contacts with Islamists, including members of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>90</sup>

Two personnel appointments also reflected the Obama Administration’s more open attitude towards Islamists. Peter Mandaville, a Professor at George Mason University in Virginia and author of two books on political Islam, joined the State Department’s Policy Planning staff in January 2011 and was described as “the department’s expert on political Islam.”<sup>91</sup> Nearly simultaneously, Quintan Wiktorowicz was added to the National Security Council as “Senior Director for Global Engagement.” Wiktorowicz wrote widely on political Islam before joining government. His approach to the policy towards Islamists was described by a former colleague as “I want the tent to be as broad as possible. ... As long as they are opposed to extremism and terrorism, I want everyone to be part of the coalition.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> David Ignatius, “A Cosmic Wager on the Muslim Brotherhood,” *The Washington Post*, February 15, 2012, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-cosmic-wager-on-the-muslim-brotherhood/2012/02/15/gIQAvIxbGR\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-cosmic-wager-on-the-muslim-brotherhood/2012/02/15/gIQAvIxbGR_story.html). See also David Ignatius, “Islamists in Power and the Obama Administration,” Remarks at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 5, 2012. Video online at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/04/05/islamists-in-power-and-obama-administration/a6uq>. The relevant remarks begin at roughly the 15:00 mark. The section that followed in Obama’s speech must also be considered as directed against Islamists as well: “there are some who advocate for democracy only when they're out of power; once in power, they are ruthless in suppressing the rights of others.” The parallels to Djerejian’s formulation are notable.

<sup>88</sup> Marc Ambinder, “Brotherhood Invited to Obama Speech by U.S.” *The Atlantic Blog*, June 3, 2009. Available online at <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2009/06/-brotherhood-invited-to-obama-speech-by-us/18693/>

<sup>89</sup> “Mustapha Ramid: Morocco Needs Real Reform, U.S. Policy Unbalanced,” 09RABAT1004, December 24, 2009. Accessed via wikileaks. available online at <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/12/09RABAT1004.html>

<sup>90</sup> “Jordan: Political Engagement Furthers Cairo Speech Goals,” 09AMMAN2516, November 18, 2009. Accessed via wikileaks, available online at:

<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09AMMAN2516.html>

<sup>91</sup> See the personnel announcement at <http://careers.hrwg-careers.usa-ctc.com/ff/meet-the-fellows/franklin-fellows/dr.-peter-mandaville>. Dr. Mandaville was one of my professors in graduate school.

<sup>92</sup> Dina Temple-Raston, “New Terrorism Advisor takes a ‘Broad Tent’ Approach,” *NPR*, January 24, 2011. Available online at <http://www.npr.org/2011/01/24/133125267/new-terrorism-adviser-takes-a-broad-tent-approach>



## Islamists amidst the Arab Spring

During the emergence of protests against Hosni Mubarak, the Obama Administration hedged its bets and lent diplomatic and rhetorical support to the Egyptian regime. As the protests grew and the regime began to shudder, the Obama Administration began to advocate an “orderly transition” designed to demobilize protestors and preserve the heart of the regime via a handoff to Vice President and intelligence chief Omar Suleiman. When the Tahrir demonstrators made that option moot, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), an unelected conglomeration of military officials, stepped in and assumed control of the transition. As the SCAF guided the transition process (and protected its own prerogatives), the United States sought to preserve the longstanding security relationship with Egypt’s generals.<sup>93</sup>

Early on in the process the Muslim Brotherhood entered the discussion, leading the Republican opposition to hammer the president. Then-presidential candidate Tim Pawlenty indicted Obama for “undermin[ing] allies in Israel” while “trying to appease...the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.” “With bullies,” Pawlenty asserted, “might makes right. Strength makes them submit. Get tough on our enemies, not our friends.”<sup>94</sup>

While opponents offered platitudes, the Administration was forced to accommodate events on the ground. Official White House statements contained no explicit references to the Muslim Brotherhood, but privately officials did not rule out dealing with the group. According to White House staff, in private discussions Obama noted the possibility of engagement with what the *New York Times* described as “nonsecular parties: diplomatic-speak for the Muslim Brotherhood.”<sup>95</sup> However as the SCAF took over the transition and began to set the timeline for elections, the United States receded into the background, only interacting with the Muslim Brotherhood by funding various NGO initiatives aimed at party building and political education that sometimes included FJP members.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*.

<sup>94</sup> Jeff Zeleny, “At Conference, GOP Hopefuls Offer Criticism of All Things Obama,” *The New York Times*, February 12, 2011. While many in the GOP withheld criticizing the president in the midst of the uprising, they would later attack Obama for abandoning Mubarak and facilitating the rise of Islamist groups. See “Mitt Romney Talks Foreign Policy,” *Hannity*, February 3, 2012. Available online at <http://www.foxnews.com/on-air/hannity/2012/02/06/mitt-romney-talks-foreign-policy> and Natasha Mozgovaya, “Rick Santorum: Israel is our Anchor in the Middle East,” *Ha’aretz*, July 21, 2011. Available online at <http://www.haaretz.com/news/u-s-elections-2012/rick-santorum-israel-is-our-anchor-in-the-middle-east-1.374488>

<sup>95</sup> Mark Landler, Helene Cooper and David D. Kirkpatrick, “A Diplomatic Scramble as an Ally is Pushed to the Exit,” *The New York Times*, February 2, 2011.

<sup>96</sup> Although an *Associated Press* investigation later revealed that the International Republican Institute (IRI) refused to work with the Muslim Brotherhood, despite the organization being a legal political entity. Brett J. Blackledge and Desmond Butler, “U.S. Democracy Aid Went to Favored Groups in Egypt,” *The Associated Press*, June 3, 2012. Available online at <http://news.yahoo.com/us-democracy-aid-went-favored-groups-egypt-181529301.html>.

In fact, the Administration's first high-level, on the record statement on the Muslim Brotherhood came following a meeting between Secretary Clinton and the Hungarian Prime Minister. Arshad Mohammed from *Reuters* queried the Secretary on the U.S. policy toward engagement with the Brotherhood. "With respect to the Muslim Brotherhood," Clinton responded, "the Obama Administration is continuing the approach of limited contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood that has existed on and off for about five or six years. We believe, given the changing political landscape in Egypt, that it is in the interests of the United States to engage with all parties that are peaceful and committed to nonviolence, that intend to compete for the parliament and the presidency. And we welcome, therefore, dialogue with those Muslim Brotherhood members who wish to talk with us...I think that the importance here is that this is not a new policy, but it is one that we are reengaging in because of the upcoming elections [...]"<sup>97</sup>

Although Clinton attempted to pitch the policy as simply a continuation of the existing approach to the group, it was undoubtedly a departure. Saad El-Katany, Secretary-General of the Brotherhood's new political party, the Freedom and Justice Party, confirmed that "no contacts [with the Americans] have been made with the group or the party."<sup>98</sup>

Despite Clinton's statements, high-level contact between the Brotherhood and senior U.S. officials did not materialize until after Egypt's parliamentary elections.<sup>99</sup> When the initial stages of the staggered elections suggested a significant Brotherhood contingent in parliament, senior officials began to formally seek out members. In early December, John Kerry, Chairman of the Senate Committee Foreign Relations, visited with senior Brotherhood officials in Cairo. In early January 2012, Assistant Secretary of State Jeffrey D. Feltman met with FJP officials, followed later in the month by Deputy Secretary of State William Burns, the second-ranking official in the State Department (behind Secretary of State Clinton). That same month, the *New York Times* asserted that the meetings were part of "a historic shift" in U.S. foreign policy towards the Islamist group.<sup>100</sup>

### **The April Visit of the Freedom and Justice Party**

The visits were reciprocated in April 2012, when a delegation of Muslim Brotherhood/FJP political officials travelled to the United States. The delegation's itinerary included meetings with the editorial board of the *Washington Post* and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, in addition to events at the

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<sup>97</sup> Hillary Clinton, "Remarks with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban," Budapest, Hungary, June 30, 2011. Available online at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/06/167374.htm>

<sup>98</sup> "U.S. to 'Resume Ties' with Egypt's Brotherhood," *al-Jazeera*, June 30, 2011. Available online at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/06/2011630194235350694.html>

<sup>99</sup> One report cited "contacts" before the elections but noted these were "not at the ambassadorial level." See Edmund Blair, "U.S. Met With Egypt Islamists: U.S. Diplomat," *Reuters*, October 2, 2011. Available online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/02/us-egypt-usa-brotherhood-idUSTRE7910J420111002>

<sup>100</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick and Steven Lee Myers, "Overtures to Egypt's Islamists Reverse Longtime U.S. Policy," *New York Times*, January 3, 2012. Available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/04/world/middleeast/us-reverses-policy-in-reaching-out-to-muslim-brotherhood.html?pagewanted=all>

Council on Foreign Relations, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Georgetown University. The delegation also attended meetings with officials in the White House (the National Security Council) and the State Department, as well as on Capitol Hill.

While procedurally speaking the visit of a delegation from the governing party of an American ally was mundane, this week-long sojourn ignited controversy.<sup>101</sup> This reaction, in turn, provides a useful chance to highlight the familiar lines of the moderate/radical debate. For instance, in a story on the trip, the *Washington Post* editorialized that the delegation was part of a “charm offensive.” The report also suggested that audiences should be skeptical of the delegation because “those sent on the trip said they were chosen in part for their fluency in English and their familiarity and ease with American culture.”<sup>102</sup> A *CNN* story took a similar line, suggesting that the visit was orchestrated as “a global goodwill tour to soften the group’s image.”<sup>103</sup>

That the visit coincided with the Brotherhood’s decision to nominate a candidate for president, in violation of an earlier pledge, also spurred charges of the Brotherhood’s duplicitousness. Eric Trager, writing at the Washington Institute for Near East policy, argued that the Brotherhood “is now pursuing outright political dominance. The MB’s reversal of its oft-repeated pledge not to run a presidential candidate also suggests that it cannot be trusted...the Brotherhood’s pursuit of a political monopoly undermines prospects for democracy in Egypt and threatens to intensify political instability—a scenario that should deeply alarm U.S. policymakers.”<sup>104</sup>

U.S. policymakers, however, were reportedly comfortable, and perhaps even sanguine, with the developments in Cairo. The Brotherhood candidate, Khairat al-Shater was a known quantity to both foreign diplomats and the SCAF, and had met with multiple delegations from Washington. Contrary to Trager, policymakers interpreted the Brotherhood’s decision to run a candidate as a decision based not on a desire to pursue a political monopoly, but as part of a strategy to forestall

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<sup>101</sup> The White House was forced onto the defensive by criticism over the meetings, as spokesmen backtracked in subsequent press conferences, initially categorizing them as “mid-level” then later dialing the description back to “low level.” Kent Klein, “White House Defends Meetings with Muslim Brotherhood,” *VOA News*, April 4, 2012. Available online at <http://www.voanews.com/content/white-house-defends-meetings-with-muslim-brotherhood-146361515/179333.html>

<sup>102</sup> William Wan, “Muslim Brotherhood Officials Aim to Promote Moderate Image in Washington Visit,” *Washington Post*, April 3, 2012. Available online at: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/muslim-brotherhood-officials-aim-to-promote-moderate-image-in-washington-visit/2012/04/03/gIQApqs1tS\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/muslim-brotherhood-officials-aim-to-promote-moderate-image-in-washington-visit/2012/04/03/gIQApqs1tS_story.html). The implication, apparently, is that foreign governments and political parties should instead send their most ignorant, boorish, and provincial members abroad to represent the organization.

<sup>103</sup> Elise Labott, “The Muslim Brotherhood Courts Washington,” *CNN Security Clearance Blog*, April 7, 2012, <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/04/07/the-muslim-brotherhood-courts-washington/>

<sup>104</sup> Eric Trager, “Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood Pursues a Political Monopoly,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policywatch 1918*, April 4, 2012, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/egypts-muslim-brotherhood-pursues-a-political-monopoly>. See also Elliot Abrams, “What Does the Muslim Brotherhood Intend?” *Pressure Points Blog*, April 13, 2012, <http://blogs.cfr.org/abrams/2012/04/13/what-does-the-muslim-brotherhood-intend/>.

gains by the more fundamentalist, and more unpredictable, Salafist candidate Hazem Abu Ismail. As the *New York Times*' Cairo correspondent put it, "American policy makers who once feared a Brotherhood takeover now appear to see the group as an indispensable ally against Egypt's ultraconservatives."<sup>105</sup>

### **An Islamist Future?**

The most significant implication of the Arab Spring is one that has little to do with Islamists. For the first time, the United States will seriously have to factor in the position of Arab opinion, whether expressed in Islamic terms or not, when crafting policies that affect the Arab world. Alliances with Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak gave U.S. policymakers the luxury of ignoring Egyptian public opinion. As former Egyptian Ambassador to the U.S. Nabil Fahmy argued, in the wake of Mubarak's ouster, "For years, the U.S. body politic has had no respect for Arab public opinion. When we would convey the public sentiment to our American interlocutors they would ignore or snicker!" The import, according to Fahmy, was basically that now the United States would need to work harder to pursue its strategic interests in the Arab World: "When we would say, 'The Israelis need to go back to the 1967 borders,' [American officials] would say, 'Well, the Israelis have a coalition government, and there is this small, minute, political party that is way off the wall here but holds the seat in some subcommittee.' Well, we have it too. So yes, you are going to see a much more assertive Egypt, an Egypt that is not less concerned with strategic objectives—they won't change—but much more concerned with immediate short-term things."<sup>106</sup>

In broad terms, Egypt's importance to the United States stems from its international orientation and strategic position, not from domestic characteristics. The weak presidency and the continuing dominance of the military in Egyptian politics mean that Egyptian politicians will be unable to exercise significant influence over the types of foreign and defense issues which concern the United States. On those issues the military will, in essence, retain a veto—one that, due to powerful ties between the Egyptian and American militaries and intelligence agencies—the United States will have a say in. For instance, while there is increasing public support for annulling the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, at 61 percent in the May 2012 Pew poll, the fact that this would end U.S. economic assistance to Egypt (including military aid) places public opinion at loggerheads with military, as well as American prerogatives.<sup>107</sup> Ending the treaty remains a risky option for Egypt, economically,

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<sup>105</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick, "In Egyptian Hard-Liner's Surge, New Worries for the Muslim Brotherhood," *The New York Times*, April 2, 2012. An Egyptian court would later disqualify both Abu Ismail and El-Shater, along with a handful of other candidates, from the presidential race.

<sup>106</sup> Nabil Fahmy, "A More Assertive Arab Foreign Policy," *Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 1, <http://www.aucegypt.edu/gapp/cairoreview/pages/articleDetails.aspx?aid=26>. The second part of the quote is cited in Jason Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention: The Politics of the U.S.-Egyptian Alliance*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012 (forthcoming)).

<sup>107</sup> "One Year Later: Egyptians Remain Optimistic, Embrace Democracy and Religion in Political Life," *Pew Global Attitudes Project*, May 8, 2012, p. 23, <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2012/05/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Project-Egypt-Report-FINAL-May-8-2012-2PM-ET.pdf>. During the uprising, Congress sought to make aid

militarily, and diplomatically, and at least for the time being President Morsi has pledged to uphold Egypt's international obligations. However, it is likely that the United States and Israel will experience far less cooperation than they have come to expect on day-to-day issues regarding the Palestinians. For example, the policy of blockading and isolating Gaza will likely find little support in Egypt.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, while U.S. over flight and Suez transit rights are unlikely to be disrupted, the Egyptian government will possibly attempt to use these questions to increase diplomatic leverage.

However politicians, including Islamist ones, will have increasing incentives to resort to nationalist and, at times, anti-American appeals. The continuing resonance of these themes among Arab publics offers a ready-made resource for politicians seeking to mobilize supporters for both electoral and bureaucratic purposes. In Egypt, civilian authorities seeking to buttress their position against the continuing military interference in politics likely will find that nationalist appeals yield promise.<sup>109</sup> Of course, these appeals will also carry an international cost: the rhetoric will cause western leaders to reassess relations with local governments. Increasingly public criticisms will also cause political problems for those foreign leaders, particularly among their own domestic oppositions seeking a political advantage. The challenge for Western policymakers will be to recognize the domestic targets of this rhetoric, while working to address legitimate grievances from strategically-deployed appeals.

The ascent of Islamists to power in Egypt also provides a test-case for Islamist groups throughout the region. As Algeria and the case of Hamas showed, the United States was never comfortable with Islamist groups coming to power, even through democratic means. Now in Egypt and Tunisia, the United States is forced to deal with the very scenario that prior administrations sought to forestall.

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to Egypt contingent on upholding the treaty with Israel. Additionally, abrogating the treaty would also jeopardize secondary sources of income, such as the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs) in Egypt.

<sup>108</sup> It would be a mistake to chalk this up to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's desire to help its sister organization Hamas. Any elected Egyptian president, secularist or Islamist, would act similarly regarding the blockade.

<sup>109</sup> See, for instance, David D. Kirkpatrick, "Power Struggle Begins as Egypt's President is Sworn In," *The New York Times*, June 30, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/01/world/middleeast/morsi-is-sworn-in-as-president-of-egypt.html?pagewanted=all>. See also David D. Kirkpatrick, "Egypt's New Leader Takes Oath, Promising to Work for Release of Jailed Terrorist," *The New York Times*, June 29, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/30/world/middleeast/morsi-promises-to-work-for-release-of-omar-abdel-rahman.html?ref=mohamedmorsi>.

# Between 'Engagement' and a 'Values-Led' Approach: Britain and the Muslim Brotherhood from 9/11 to the Arab Spring

By Martyn Frampton & Shiraz Maher

## Introduction

David Cameron became the first Western leader to visit Egypt in the wake of Hosni Mubarak's deposition in February 2011. On that occasion, while promising to help Egyptians create the "building blocks of democracy," Cameron refused to meet with the Muslim Brotherhood. For this, he was censured by a prominent member of the organization's Guidance Bureau, Essam al-Erian, who dismissed Cameron as irrelevant, declaring that "Egypt finished with the British occupation 65 years ago."<sup>1</sup> Subsequent developments brought a shift in British posture. By April 2011, a delegation from the British Foreign Office, led by Consul-General Marie-Louise Archer was reported to have visited the Brotherhood's administrative offices in Alexandria. "Ikhwanweb," the group's English-language website, claimed the meeting flowed from new British efforts to cooperate with the group and alleged that the Relations Coordinator for the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Martin Hetringen, had expressed the government's desire to open the door toward full, direct political dialogue with the Brotherhood.<sup>2</sup> The British Ambassador to Egypt, James Watt, subsequently said the group was entitled to take part in the country's transition to democracy and downplayed concerns about the organization.<sup>3</sup>

Britain was not alone in re-examining its position during this period. The French Foreign Minister, Alain Juppe, also signalled that France would be "willing to talk to everyone" in Egypt, including the Brotherhood and even suggested that France had previously been misled by Arab governments about the true nature of the group.<sup>4</sup> In response, the British-based Brotherhood leader, Kemal Helbawi (who has since left the group), expressed satisfaction that western governments now appeared ready to discard "false accusations" against the Brotherhood, while Essam al-Erian confirmed they would talk to western governments without preconditions.<sup>5</sup> Soon after, *Al-Ahram* reported that a spokesman for Baroness Ashton, the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, had said, when asked about the Muslim Brotherhood, that the EU was "open to dialogue with anyone who is interested in democracy." It was confirmed, too, that she had met with members of the organization during a visit to Egypt shortly after the revolution began.<sup>6</sup> By late summer 2011, the Brotherhood's political leaders had also met with the acting

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<sup>1</sup> "Middle East crisis: David Cameron arrives in Egypt to push for democracy," *Daily Telegraph*, February 21, 2011; "Muslim Brothers see corruption-free Egypt flourishing," *Al-Arabiya News*, February 23, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Sayyed Al-Abbadi, "Foreign Office Visits MB in Alexandria," *Ikhwanweb*, April 10, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> "UK Ambassador Downplays Concerns of Growing MB Political Role," *Ikhwanweb*, June 29, 2011,

<sup>4</sup> "France signals new openness on Muslim groups abroad," *Reuters*, April 19, 2011,

<sup>5</sup> "MB welcomes dialogue with the West without preconditions," *Ikhwanweb*, April 22, 2011,

<sup>6</sup> "EU ready to expand dialogue with Muslim Brotherhood," *Jerusalem Post*, May 7, 2011.

Russian ambassador at the party's headquarters in Cairo.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the United States revised its public attitude towards the Brotherhood in June of the same year. Although U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton initially insisted that the United States would only initiate limited contacts with the group, by early 2012 representatives from the State Department, Senate, and White House had met with Brotherhood officials in both Cairo and Washington.<sup>8</sup>

It would, thus, seem that the Arab Spring has precipitated a new era of relations between western countries and the most influential Islamist organization in the Middle East.<sup>9</sup> That this should be the case is perhaps inevitable given that the Muslim Brotherhood has emerged as “the big winner” from events in Egypt. Previously banned for more than half a century, and forced to operate in semi-clandestine fashion, it is now the largest organized political force. In the parliamentary elections that concluded in January 2012, the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) won 235 seats out of a possible 503, taking 37 percent of the vote.<sup>10</sup> Its success comes amidst a broader wave of Islamist success. To the surprise of many, the ultra-conservative Salafist al-Nour party came second with 123 seats, which represents 28 percent of the vote.<sup>11</sup> More recently, the Brotherhood's Mohammed Mursi was elected Egypt's first post-Mubarak president after defeating a former general, Ahmed Shafiq, in the June 2012 run-off.

These developments have channelled Islamist activism away from extra-state actors who operate beyond the system (often embracing violent means), instead placing a premium on civic engagement through existing constitutional and legal forms. Indeed, it is this new reality that poses a real challenge to British and other western governments. Terrorist groups and those operating beyond the law are easily condemned; their excesses serve as a synecdoche by which they are wholly defined. The difficulty comes when such groups transition into the realm of legitimacy conferred by electoral success. An early indication of the problems this can create arose when Hamas won the Palestinian Legislative Elections in Gaza in 2006. The United States and the Quartet on the Middle East all immediately responded by suspending aid to Gaza and refusing to recognize the Hamas government there. Six years later, the results of that policy might be described, at best, as mixed; Hamas remains *in situ* and the Arab-Israeli conflict appears no closer to resolution. Of course, that situation is a

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<sup>7</sup> “Muslim Brotherhood party leaders meet with Russian diplomat,” *Abram Online*, August 11, 2011,

<sup>8</sup> A. Mohammed, “U.S. shifts to closer contact with Egypt Islamists,” Reuters, June 30, 2011; “U.S. met with Egypt Islamists: U.S. diplomat,” Reuters, October 2, 2011; “US senator John Kerry visits Muslim Brotherhood's FJP headquarters,” *Ahram Online*, December 11, 2011; “Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood hails ties with US,” AFP, January 11, 2012; “Officials from Egypt's Brotherhood at White House,” AFP, April 4, 2012; “Obama Administration says it talked with Muslim Brotherhood to promote small business,” CNS News, April 23, 2012

<sup>9</sup> Here the term Islamist is not used in a pejorative sense, but simply to denote a political movement that seeks to bring about the renewal of Islam throughout society, as an essential step towards instituting an Islamic State. For a comprehensive introduction to this subject see, P. Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2007); J. Calvert, *Islamism: A Documentary and Reference Guide* (Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 2008), F. Volpi (ed.), *Political Islam: A critical reader* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> “Intikhabaat Musr,” <http://www.elections2011.eg/>. Last accessed June 2, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

particular one and its lessons are not easily transferable to other Middle Eastern countries. Unlike the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, for example, Hamas is an avowedly terrorist group, publicly committed to the destruction of Israel. This makes it an unpalatable and unacceptable partner. In Egypt, by contrast, the Brotherhood has, at least in its domestic context, long disavowed the use of revolutionary violence.

Yet, this is not to say that serious questions do not remain about how to deal with the Brotherhood—many of which stem from the broader spectrum of its views. The group, for instance, retains a persistent belief in the efficacy of violent jihad as the only way to deal with Israel. There are conflicting signals about what this would mean in terms of how a Brotherhood administration would act once in power. Some Brotherhood spokesmen have promised to abide by the terms of the Egyptian-Israeli Camp David peace treaty; others have professed a more belligerent, even bellicose, set of policies.<sup>12</sup>

This one example epitomizes the new complications that will arise from the Brotherhood's ascendancy in Egypt. The extent of these challenges was apparent during the presidential elections that followed Mubarak's deposition. One campaign rally for the Brotherhood's candidate, Mohammed Mursi, featured the controversial cleric, Safwat Hegazi who told the rally that "millions of martyrs" would "march toward Jerusalem." Hegazi is well known to the British authorities. In 2009 the Home Office included him on a list of 16 foreign hate preachers who would be excluded from entering the United Kingdom on the grounds that his presence in Britain would not be conducive to the public good. He was specifically identified as someone "engaging in unacceptable behaviour by glorifying terrorist violence."<sup>13</sup> Despite his extreme views, he was regarded by the Brotherhood as an important individual to endorse Mursi's (ultimately successful) candidature.

The prospect for very real policy dilemmas is therefore acute, particularly as the volatile and fissiparous miasma that now envelopes the region intensifies. Charting a way forward and deciding on an appropriate policy for dealing with the Brotherhood and other Islamist groups is likely to test even the brightest mandarins of the British state.

### **A Long-running Debate: Democratization and/or Counterterrorism?**

In the British context, discussions over whether or not to engage with the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists are far from new. Indeed, Mark Curtis has shown there is a long-standing impulse within the DNA of British foreign policy to view strains of conservative Islam and Islamism as potential allies—whether as part of an effort to preserve imperial influence, or as a way of providing an alternative to more dangerous challenges, such as those posed by Nasserism and communism.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> U.S.: Muslim Brotherhood gave assurances on Egypt-Israel peace treaty, *Haaretz*, January 6, 2012; "Khairat Al-Shater: Fulfilling Egyptian Revolution's Demands Top Muslim Brotherhood Priority," Ikhwanweb, January 28, 2012

<sup>13</sup> *Home Office name hate promoters excluded from the UK*, Home Office press release, May 5, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> M. Curtis, *Secret Affairs: Britain's Collusion with Radical Islam* (Serpent's Tail: London, 2010)



With regards to American policy, Ian Johnson’s work has shown the prominence of similar tendencies there.<sup>15</sup>

More recently, debates over whether or not to pursue engagement have been bound up with broader concerns about how to promote democratic reform in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The explicit adoption of a “freedom agenda” by the Bush administration from 2003 onwards intensified these arguments. Those advocating dialogue with the Ikhwan have portrayed it as an indispensable partner for western countries—a necessary ingredient of any process of democratization, given their sizable support base in much of that region. Those opposed to such ideas have invariably charged their advocates with being naive about the Brotherhood’s intentions and view it in a far less positive light.

In Britain, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has come out particularly strongly in favor of such engagement. A report produced by Joshua Stacher in 2008, *Brothers in Arms? Engaging the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt*, consequently portrayed the group as a “critical element of the Egyptian political landscape.”<sup>16</sup> It argued that groups like it had “proved themselves to be sophisticated and responsible political actors [who] should also be considered as potential partners in processes of regional political development.”<sup>17</sup> According to Stacher, recent policy documents produced by the Brotherhood exhibited “few hints of a reactionary movement bent on religious rule by force”—rather, they were said to show a group “committed to achieving more concrete political reforms.”<sup>18</sup> For this reason, he claimed it was “perhaps more appropriate to view the group’s political beliefs as being based on universal values that are cloaked in an Islamic idiom.”<sup>19</sup> The supposedly pragmatic nature of the Brotherhood’s character led Stacher to conclude that:

Representatives of western governments should seek more opportunities for dialogue with political opposition groups in Egypt, including the Muslim Brotherhood... [they] must be more willing to engage with the Brotherhood on the basis of what it says and how it acts, rather than treating it as an inflexible and dogmatic religious organisation with which there can be no common ground.<sup>20</sup>

The IPPR echoed similar sentiments the following year in a report authored by Alex Glennie. She urged Western policymakers to “fundamentally rethink their political strategy for engaging with Islamist parties and movements.”<sup>21</sup> They were also called to be “more proactive in creating channels for serious and sustained dialogue with Islamists.”<sup>22</sup> Glennie’s premise was that achieving democratic

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<sup>15</sup> I. Johnson, *A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010)

<sup>16</sup> J. Stacher, *Brothers in Arms? Engaging the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt* (IPPR, 2008)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> A. Glennie, *Building Bridges, Not Walls: Engaging with political Islamists in the Middle East and North Africa* (IPPR, 2009) pp. 6-7, 44-5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

reform in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region required “dialogue with some of the existing mainstream Islamist movements there.”<sup>23</sup> In this context, Islamist movements were defined as those “groups that engage or seek to engage in the legal political process of their countries and that have publicly eschewed the use of violence to help realise their objectives at the national level, even where they are discriminated against or repressed.”<sup>24</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood was specifically cited as just such a group.

Elsewhere, a similar line of argument has been advocated by groups such as Forward Thinking and Conflicts Forum. The former has a particular focus on the Arab-Israeli conflict and urges the “participation of those who are regarded as political or religious hardliners” in any peace process.<sup>25</sup> This stance is echoed by Conflicts Forum, a lobby group set up in 2004 under the aegis of directors Mark Perry and Alistair Crooke, who call on the west to “to talk to the Islamists who can influence events,” citing Hamas, Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood as prime examples.<sup>26</sup> Crooke, a former officer in the Secret Intelligence Service (also known as MI6), is a particularly outspoken advocate of engaging with Islamist groups.<sup>27</sup>

The case thus made by proponents of engagement with Islamists is that in order to achieve reform and democratization in the region—and particularly in Egypt—one must do business with the Muslim Brotherhood. The latter is held to be “the only game in town.” Against this, are those who view the Brotherhood as a theocratic movement, fundamentally opposed to democratic pluralism. On their reading, the democratic empowerment of the Brotherhood would mean, to echo Bernard Lewis’s famous formulation, “one man, one vote, one time.”<sup>28</sup>

The period since 9/11 has seen the intertwining of such disputes with other concerns. As Lorenzo Vidino has noted, in the aftermath of that attack, policymakers have been forced to ask whether the Brotherhood should be seen as “fire fighters or arsonists.”<sup>29</sup> On one side are those who feel that because the movement shares certain ideological reference points with the militants of al Qaeda—effectively allowing the Brotherhood to “speak their language”—then it can help insulate potential recruits against the siren call to violent jihad. By contrast, others argue that the Muslim Brotherhood and its message, like that of other reactionary groups, actually serve as a gateway to more radical and

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> “Middle East Initiative,” Forward Thinking website

<sup>26</sup> “About Conflicts Forum,” Conflicts Forum website

<sup>27</sup> A. Crooke, *Resistance: The Essence of the Islamist Revolution* (Pluto Press: London, 2009). See also, J. Harkin, “Middleman in the Middle East,” *Financial Times*, January 2, 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis's phrase was brought to a wider audience by the then Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Edward Djerejian, in a 1992 speech in Washington D.C. See, Edward Djerejian, Meridian House Speech, Washington, D.C., June 4, 1992.

<sup>29</sup> L. Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2010), pp. 199-221.

violent forms of Islamism.<sup>30</sup> At the heart of this debate is a key question: how should democratic change be initiated in the Middle East/North Africa region while guarding against the threat posed by Islamist terrorists? In Britain, the effort to solve this conundrum was still in flux when it took on added urgency and importance following the July 7, 2005 terrorist attacks on the London transport network—an event more commonly referred to as 7/7.

### **Preventing Extremism: an Imperative for Dialogue?**

A year before the 7/7 attacks, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had established its Engaging with the Islamic World Group (EIWG). A product of the post-9/11 environment—and the leading role that Britain subsequently played in the “war on terror”—the EIWG undertook a variety of work that aimed to both “increase understanding of and engagement with Muslim countries and communities” and “counter the ideological, and theological underpinnings of the terrorist narrative, in order to prevent radicalisation.” Its mission was to facilitate “constructive engagement with a wide range of groups and opinion.”<sup>31</sup> From 2005 the EIWG took on new salience as a central part of the FCO’s departmental contribution to the government’s “Prevent” initiative.

Prevent is one of the four prongs that makes up the wider “CONTEST” strategy for counter-terrorism in the United Kingdom, first published in 2006 and later revised in 2009.<sup>32</sup> The other three, “pursue,” “protect” and “prepare” are more concerned with what might be termed “hard” power responses to immediate security issues.<sup>33</sup> Prevent, by contrast, represents an attempt by the government to deploy “soft power” in the struggle against violent threats—to interdict the process of radicalization from which terrorism emerges. As such, it has been primarily concerned with engaging Muslim communities, groups, and individuals—both at home and abroad. And within this context, a fundamental issue raised by the creation of Prevent was how far Islamists should be seen as appropriate partners for government.

The character of Prevent has evolved considerably since its inception. In the immediate aftermath of the 2005 bombings, the government turned to traditional, nationally-run gatekeeper organizations, which claimed to speak on behalf of British Muslims. Downing Street convened seven working groups to investigate radicalism in Muslim communities which produced the *Preventing Extremism Together* (PET) report. This was subsequently presented to then Prime Minister Tony Blair as a blueprint for fighting extremism.<sup>34</sup> Yet, many of the working groups were overwhelmingly comprised of individuals from the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), a group itself accused of holding extremist views due to its links with the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI)—the South Asian equivalent of

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<sup>30</sup> For a broader perspective on this line of reasoning, see M. Burleigh, *Blood and Rage: A Cultural History of Terrorism* (Harper Press: London, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> “Engaging the Islamic World, International Priorities,” The Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

<sup>32</sup> *Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom’s Strategy* (July 2006) Cm:6888

<sup>33</sup> For an analysis of this aspect, see Frank Gregory, “The UK’s Domestic Response to Global Terrorism: Strategy, Structure and Implementation with Special Reference to the Role of the Police,” *Real Instituto Elcano*, June 18, 2007

<sup>34</sup> *Preventing Extremism Together Working Groups August-October 2005* (Home Office, October 2005)

the Muslim Brotherhood. One participant in the Working Groups, Haras Rafiq, resigned in protest. “It was as if they had decided what their findings were before they had begun; people were just going through the motions,” he said.<sup>35</sup>

Rafiq’s voice was just one of a number who were critical of the apparent willingness of some within the British state to work with Islamists on the basis of an imagined “security imperative.” Initially, it was the latter that served to frame the character of Prevent. But 2006 proved to be a decisive year for the debate. In that year, police uncovered an ambitious plot by a group of British Muslims to simultaneously detonate liquid bombs on several transatlantic aircraft flying from London to the United States. The scale of the conspiracy was unprecedented, even threatening to eclipse the destruction of 9/11. More significant for this article, was the reaction of the government’s erstwhile allies in the MCB; for having failed to deliver on promises made in the PET report, the MCB blamed British and U.S. foreign policy as the primary motivation behind the plot. In the eyes of the Prime Minister and others within Cabinet this was a step too far. The MCB was felt to be legitimizing terrorism, drawing moral equivalences, while failing to directly confront the radicalization of some young British men. This raised fresh and troubling concerns about its suitability as a partnership organization. Subsequently, therefore, the government sought to rebalance its relationship with groups like the MCB by empowering alternative organizations at the grassroots. The new mantra in Whitehall was that it would only work with groups and individuals that accepted a set of “non-negotiable values.”<sup>36</sup> Greater attention was also directed to local initiatives through schemes such as the Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund (PVE) which was overseen by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).<sup>37</sup>

Despite this, anxieties persisted about the manner in which Prevent was operating.<sup>38</sup> Particular unease concerned the question of which groups were being engaged with and funded at the local level.<sup>39</sup> Again, the pertinence of all this is that government resources appeared to be being channelled towards groups ideologically inspired by—or linked by key individuals to—the Muslim Brotherhood. Among the most important in the British domestic context are the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) and its offshoots, the British Muslim Initiative (BMI), and the Cordoba Foundation.

The MAB was founded by the then European spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood, Kemal Helbawi, in 1997 and has been described, both by sympathetic observers and in parliament as a

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<sup>35</sup> James Brandon, “The UK’s Experience in Counter-Radicalization,” *CTC Sentinel* (April, 2008)

<sup>36</sup> T. Helm, “Back British values or lose grants, Kelly tells Muslim groups,” *Daily Telegraph*, October 12, 2006,

<sup>37</sup> *Preventing Violent Extremism – winning hearts and minds*; and *The Prevent Strategy: A Guide for Local Partners in England* (April, 2007); *The Prevent Strategy: A Guide for Local Partners in England, stopping people becoming or supporting terrorists and violent extremists* (May, 2008) Ref: 288324

<sup>38</sup> *House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, Preventing Violent Extremism, Sixth Report of Session 2009-10* (March, 2010) HC:65

<sup>39</sup> *Council Spending Uncovered II: No. 5: The Prevent Strategy*, (Taxpayers Alliance, 2009); S. Maher and M. Frampton, *Choosing our friends wisely: Criteria for engagement with Muslim groups* (Policy Exchange, 2009)

“Muslim Brotherhood group.”<sup>40</sup> This perception was strengthened by the fact that leading MAB members have included Azzam Tamimi, Mohammed Sawalha and Anas al-Tikriti. Tamimi has travelled internationally as a “special envoy” of Hamas and is known for his defence of the group, while Sawalha has been described in American court documents—and by the BBC—as a former “Hamas leader in the West Bank” until the mid-1990s.<sup>41</sup> After playing a central role in the MAB, Sawalha later created the British Muslim Initiative (BMI) in 2006. Anas al-Tikriti was closely involved with this initiative and is himself a former chairman of the MAB.<sup>42</sup> In 2005 he also founded the Cordoba Foundation, ostensibly to “promote dialogue” between “the West and the Muslim world.”<sup>43</sup>

The exact nature of the relationship between these different groups is unclear.<sup>44</sup> Tikriti has described the MAB and the BMI (and his own position within them), in the following terms:

The MAB is a grassroots organisation established almost 11 years ago, and I had the honour of being amongst its founding members. I am a member of MAB and was its president in 2004, although I no longer hold a leading post within it. BMI is a political organisation founded by a group of activists in 2006. It does not have a membership, nor does it cover aspects of a British Muslim's life beyond politics (such as MAB does). I am one of the founding members, and currently spokesman for BMI.<sup>45</sup>

This is not to say, however, that groups such as the BMI and the MAB follow orders from an Islamist equivalent of the Comintern. Indeed, the MAB has attempted to show some independence from the Muslim Brotherhood abroad. During his tenure as President, Anas al-Tikriti told the *Times*:

[The] MAB reserves the right to be proud of the humane notions and principles of the Muslim Brotherhood, who has proven to be an inspiration to Muslims, Arab and otherwise for many

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<sup>40</sup> For Helbawy's role, see <http://www.khelbawy.com/about.html>. On the MAB, see *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*, December 18, 2003, Column 1763; Peter Bergen and Paul Cruikshank, “The Unravelling: the jihadist revolt against Al Qaeda” *The New Republic*, June 11, 2008

<sup>41</sup> For Tamimi, see *BERNAMA* Malaysian News Agency, June 27, 2006. Also see Mohammed Muslih, *The Foreign Policy of Hamas*, Council on Foreign Relations (New York, 1999) p.14; For Sawalha, see *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*, December 18, 2003, Column 1763

<sup>42</sup> S. Maher and M. Frampton, *Choosing our friends wisely: Criteria for engagement with Muslim groups* (Policy Exchange, 2009)

<sup>43</sup> “*The Cordoba Foundation – About us*,” [www.thecordobafoundation.com](http://www.thecordobafoundation.com)

<sup>44</sup> A recent academic study has stated: “Some saw the latter as a wholly new organisation, not warmly regarded by MAB's leadership. For others, BMI is effectively—though not officially—a branch of MAB, its principal members drawn from the membership and former leadership of that organisation,” in Richard Phillips, “Standing together: the Muslim Association of Britain and the anti-war movement” in *Race & Class*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (2008), p. 109

<sup>45</sup> A. Al-Tikriti, “Live Dialogue,” *IslamOnline*, May 5, 2008

decades. We also reserve the right to disagree with or divert from the opinion and line of the Muslim Brotherhood, or any other organization, Muslim or otherwise on any issue at hand.<sup>46</sup>

Yet, it is clear that groups like the MAB consider themselves in step with a broader movement which adheres to an Islamist ideology.

Within the context of Prevent and PVE initiatives, each of these organizations was a recipient of official funding. Thus, in 2006-7, the Cordoba Foundation was allocated £34,000 by Tower Hamlets local authority for activities meant to counter extremism (though part of this was later withdrawn after objections were raised).<sup>47</sup> In 2006, meanwhile, a Mosque and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) was created with the involvement of four stakeholder organizations—of which the MAB was one. The government allocated it £75,600 in 2007-8 and a further £116,000 in 2008-9.<sup>48</sup>

In the British context, it is therefore clear that those close to the Brotherhood—those who articulate a similar worldview and are sympathetic to its aims—have clearly benefitted from Prevent funds. The same is true abroad.

### **The Role of the FCO: Blurring the Foreign and the Domestic**

Since 2006, the Foreign Office has played a key role in Prevent as part of its “strategic priorities.” The role of the EIWG has already been noted. More broadly, the government has listed the activities of the FCO in this sphere as comprising:

- The “empowering voices of mainstream Islam” road show, which involves large events where young British Muslims can encounter Muslim scholars tackling extremist misinterpretations of Islam;
- The “Muslims of Europe” conference: bringing together key Western and Muslim-world Muslim thinkers and scholars, for a strong theological declaration rejecting extremism and terrorism, in Istanbul in June 2006;
- Developing contacts with high-profile, influential figures in the Muslim world; and
- An FCO foreign policy awareness and outreach programme, involving... diplomatic activity with key international partners and international organisations to reach agreement on the nature and dangers of radicalisation and frame common approaches to address it.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See, David Toube, “Reject the support of Islamists,” *Jewish Chronicle*, April 18, 2008; “MAB responds to vile attack,” *Islamic Human Rights Commission*, <http://www.ihrc.org.uk/show.php?id=1216>.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> *Council Spending Uncovered II: No. 5: The Prevent Strategy* (Taxpayers Alliance, 2009)

<sup>49</sup> Government Response to the Intelligence and Security Committee’s Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on July 7, 2005 (May 2006), Cm 6786.

Through these initiatives, the FCO dispensed a substantial amount of Prevent funding. For example, in 2008-9 it allocated £127,740 to its own Counter-Terrorism Department for the purpose of “promoting moderate Islam.” The same department also received £220,853 for a project known as “projecting British Islam” and a further £4,588 for “Prevent inward media visits.”<sup>50</sup>

One of the key initiatives in this regard was the Radical Middle Way (RMW) whose stated aims included “empowering voices of mainstream Islam.” As described above, it primarily sought to achieve this through a series of road shows and was generously supported by government sponsorship.<sup>51</sup> The creation of the RMW was one of the key recommendations to emerge from the Preventing Extremism Together report and was launched in late 2005 with support from the Home Office, FCO and DCLG.<sup>52</sup> Several Muslim organizations also backed its launch including *Q-News*, the Young Muslim Organisation (YMO) and the Federation of Islamic Student Societies (FOSIS).<sup>53</sup> Parliamentary questions have revealed that between February 2006 and March 2007, the RMW received £412,129 from the FCO and Home Office; in 2007-8 it received a further £275,000.<sup>54</sup> In addition the RMW enjoyed support from local authorities, including Southwark which gave it £21,563 in 2007-8, and Tower Hamlets which awarded it £6000.<sup>55</sup>

A series of internal FCO documents leaked to the journalist Martin Bright suggested that this coalition was assembled at the explicit request of EIWG officials in the FCO.<sup>56</sup> The guiding impulse for the scheme was the idea that “influential international and national mainstream scholars and thinkers” should be used to “theologically and intellectually tackle extremist interpretations of Islam.”<sup>57</sup> In its incipient phases, RMW activity was concentrated in areas thought to be especially vulnerable to Islamist extremism within Britain including: London, Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, Kirklees, Leicester, and Luton. However, the RMW was also tasked with speaking to Muslim communities abroad to promote a better image of the United Kingdom. FCO documents reveal that it was in this context that senior civil servants attempted to identify “leading personalities in the Muslim world” including “figures with transnational religious influence.”<sup>58</sup> Figures from the Muslim Brotherhood were among those identified as just such figures.<sup>59</sup> As a result, Kemal

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<sup>50</sup> Council Spending Uncovered II: No. 5: The Prevent Strategy (Taxpayers Alliance, 2009)

<sup>51</sup> For more on the RMW see *Preventing Violent Extremism: Winning Hearts and Minds* (April 2007); *Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Departmental Report 1 April 2006 – 31 March 2007* (May 2007) Cm 7099.

<sup>52</sup> *Preventing Extremism Together: Working Group Report* (August-October 2005)

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>54</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*, November 27, 2007, Column 347W

<sup>55</sup> *Council Spending Uncovered II: No. 5: The Prevent Strategy*, (Taxpayers Alliance, 2009)

<sup>56</sup> “Subject: UK NGO Selection for Roadshow Project” (August 16, 2005) Document 12 in M. Bright, *When progressives treat with reactionaries: The British State’s flirtation with radical Islamism* (Policy Exchange, 2006)

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>59</sup> “Who’s Who in the Umma: leading personalities in the Muslim world,” [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

Helbawi—the onetime spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood in the West—was invited to address an RMW event in 2009.<sup>60</sup>

The manner in which RMW has been run is indicative of the way in which the exigencies of Prevent have led some within government to blur the boundaries between the domestic and the foreign. In a globalized world where radical Islamists have imagined the existence of a transnational *Ummah*, many officials came to believe that the British state’s response should be equally comprehensive in character. In the battle to combat violent extremism, it is clear that some officials have seen so-called “moderate” Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, as constituting ideal partners. As an FCO document seen by the authors (which is undated, but which was produced some time between July 2004 and August 2006), states:

Not only does HMG [Her Majesty’s Government] now recognise that engagement with Islamic countries is of high strategic importance, but it acknowledges that work with Islamists—those who base politics on Islamic principles—is a key element to this engagement... We must first identify who we are talking about: it is easy to point to the self-proclaimed Islamist parties which operate in the more open political systems... but what about the Islamist media... intellectuals (e.g. Qatar-based Yusuf al-Qaradawi) and religious institutions... These too play a political role.<sup>61</sup>

The scholar mentioned here, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, has been the subject of deep controversy in Britain since 2004. A former member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, he was invited to assume the position of its General Guide (providing overall spiritual leadership) on at least two occasions—although he refused on both occasions, preferring instead to maintain an independent powerbase while retaining immense influence within the Brotherhood. Indeed, he enjoys such prominence that Bettina Gräf and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen have labelled him a “phenomenon” and a “global Mufti.”<sup>62</sup> Much of his international stature has been built from Qatar where he has lived in exile since the 1960s, and where he enjoys relative freedom to express his views freely. As a result, Qaradawi has produced many publications and hosts a popular television show, *Shariah and Life*, on al-Jazeera.

Qaradawi visited London in July 2004 for a meeting of the European Council for Fatwa Research (ECFR) and to launch the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS)—both of which he chaired. More significantly, he was also invited to attend a reception at City Hall by then Mayor, Ken Livingstone. This, despite the fact that Qaradawi was, at that time, banned from entering the United States because of fatwas he had issued sanctioning Palestinian suicide bombing. Clearly, such views did not trouble Livingstone. Nor were they considered an obstacle to closer relations with the Sheikh by others within Whitehall. On the contrary, some British officials were only too willing to

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<sup>60</sup> For more on Helbawi see above p. XX

<sup>61</sup> Political Islam—REDACTED (Discussion on Projects), [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

<sup>62</sup> Bettina Gräf and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *The Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yusuf al-Qaradawi* (London, 2009).



entertain Qaradawi on the basis of his assumed influence among British Muslims. A letter from the Head of the Middle East Department at the FCO to the Home Office in July 2004 stated, “Qaradawi has some controversial opinions, but none that are particularly unusual or exceptional amongst Muslims.”<sup>63</sup> The author also noted that Qaradawi had condemned al Qaeda and been critical of hard-line Taliban injunctions. And while the letter did acknowledge that the Sheikh had “made clear his support” for suicide bombing in Israel, and resistance in Iraq, it nonetheless concluded that Qaradawi was “regarded by most as a pragmatic conservative in the classic Muslim Brotherhood mould rather than a fanatic or extremist.”<sup>64</sup> It was on the basis of views such as this, then, that the FCO were prepared to support his entry into the country.

It is clear that even though the FCO was fully aware of Qaradawi’s views, it did not regard them as inherently problematic. An e-mail sent by FCO officials after Qaradawi’s 2004 visit displays an awareness of the fact that he believed America had invaded Iraq “by force and without legitimacy, and that this occupation can and should legitimately be resisted.” However, it was also suggested that Qaradawi should not be seen in the same way as al Qaeda supporters because he preferred “properly sanctioned means i.e. religiously sanctioned and controlled and according to the rules of war.” The author went on to advise his FCO counterparts that “while this is an unwelcome view to us, it is not a particularly radical one and in fact reflects the broad view of most Muslims in the region.”<sup>65</sup> In fact, not only was it argued that the British state should engage with Qaradawi despite his views—but that failing to do so would be counterproductive. Marginalizing Qaradawi, it was said, would “alienate significant and influential members of the global Muslim community” and “have a negative impact on our relations with British Muslim communities,” the e-mail cautioned.<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, for some sections of the British state, *prima facie* concerns about Qaradawi’s views on certain issues merely enhanced his suitability as a possible partner. Ian Blair, who was Chief Constable of the Metropolitan Police at the time, publicly confirmed in 2006 that Qaradawi held “views on the Palestinian intifada that probably would not be very acceptable... [and] has views about the role of women in Islamic society, which are not very acceptable either.” However, Blair went on to state that he overlooked these considerations because Qaradawi could “command an audience of 50,000 young people at the drop of a hat.” A premium was therefore placed on engagement. For Blair, the equation and its answer were simple: “Are you going to talk to him or not? ... our view is, ‘Yes we

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<sup>63</sup> “Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi” (July 14, 2005) Document 6 in M. Bright, *When progressives treat with reactionaries: The British State’s flirtation with radical Islamism* (Policy Exchange, 2006).

<sup>64</sup> “Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi,” Letter from Head of Middle East Department to “Unnamed,” Home Office, July 8, 2004 [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

<sup>65</sup> E-mail to Simon Lovett, November 2, 2004. For more on FCO awareness of Qaradawi’s views see “Qaradawi – RESTRICTED” E-mail, August 30, 2005 – on his legitimization of “resistance against occupation” and his assertion that it was a “religious duty” for Muslims to “defend their land, using all means available to them, including suicide operations.” [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

<sup>66</sup> “Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi” (July 14, 2005) Document 6 in M. Bright, *When progressives treat with reactionaries: The British State’s flirtation with radical Islamism* (Policy Exchange, 2006).

are going to talk to him however difficult that becomes.”<sup>67</sup> The Muslim Contact Unit, which had been set up by Metropolitan Police Special Branch, went even further. In a statement circulated to the FCO, they described Qaradawi as having “a positive Muslim community impact in the fight against Al Qaida [sic] propaganda in the UK. His support for Palestinian suicide bombers adds credibility to his condemnation of Al Qaida in those sections of the community most susceptible to the blandishments of Al Qaida terrorist propaganda.”<sup>68</sup>

More generally, it is clear that Qaradawi continued to be seen as a positive influence by many within British officialdom.<sup>69</sup> In March 2006, the FCO organized a meeting between the Sheikh and a delegation of British Muslims that it took to Qatar.<sup>70</sup> During that gathering Qaradawi was said to have encouraged them to integrate into British society.<sup>71</sup> Later that year he was invited to attend a conference on Muslims in Europe, which was organized and paid for by the FCO and held in Istanbul.<sup>72</sup> Billed as a gathering of “many of Europe’s most eminent Muslim scholars and thinkers,” together with their “international counterparts,” the conference produced a “unique declaration urging European Muslims to promote active citizenship and social harmony.”<sup>73</sup>

In this respect, the Foreign Office’s relationship with Qaradawi typified the way in which the challenges of the “war on terror” era were seen as traversing the border between domestic and foreign issues. Qaradawi was felt to be making a positive contribution to the conduct of both British foreign policy and domestic counterterrorism efforts. For this reason, engagement was deemed legitimate and necessary. In this respect, the very existence of a relationship with a man often still described as a spiritual guide for the Muslim Brotherhood was emblematic of the broader evolution in policy in the last decade.

### **Embracing Engagement: Reaching out to the Muslim Brotherhood**

In 2006 when Michael Gove MP was Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, he asked Kim Howells, then Middle East Minister, about the nature of the British government’s relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. Howells replied that there had been “occasional contact” with members of group. He also noted that officials had “met representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan,

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<sup>67</sup> “Connecting Counter-Terrorism and Community Policy,” Remarks by Sir Ian Blair, Citizens Crime Commission of New York (April, 2006); C. Caldwell, “After Londonistan,” *New York Times*, June 25, 2006.

<sup>68</sup> Undated “Annex: Qaradawi Quotes” [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]. It is clear from Bright, *When Progressives Treat with Reactionaries*, that it is the annex to Mockbul Ali’s letter of July 14, 2005 (Document 6).

<sup>69</sup> For example, Qaradawi’s December 2005 appeal for Iraq’s Sunni minority to “participate fully” in the country’s approaching parliamentary elections was described by at least one FCO official as “helpful and timely.” See “Iraq: Qaradawi calls for Sunni participation in the elections,” *eGram*, December 4, 2005.

<sup>70</sup> “UK Muslims Visit to Qatar – Programme,” FCO, March 6, 2006.

<sup>71</sup> S. Collis, “Qatar: UK Muslims Delegation meeting with Qaradawi,” *eGram*, March 7, 2006.

<sup>72</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*, July 20, 2006, Column 630W; *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*, July 25, 2006, c1282W

<sup>73</sup> “Press Release: Muslims of Europe Conference,” British Embassy Riyadh, July 10, 2006.

Kuwait, and Lebanon” and had “limited contact with members of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, whose membership is in exile in London.”<sup>74</sup>

The existence of such contacts came as no surprise. During an extensive interview with *Asbarq al-Awsat*, a London-based Arabic newspaper, Kemal Helbawi confirmed that dialogue between the British government and the Brotherhood had been a constant feature of state policy. Indeed, Helbawi even claimed that during the mid-1990s, when Hosni Mubarak launched a crackdown on Egyptian Islamist groups, the British government had asked him if he required personal protection. In that event, he refused. Although the veracity of this particular claim may be difficult to verify, there is evidence to support the general proposition that UK officials actively courted and cultivated a relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood during much of the last decade.

In 2005 a series of documents from the Foreign Office were leaked to Martin Bright, then political editor of the *New Statesman*, and subsequently published by the think tank Policy Exchange. They revealed that prior to 2002 the Foreign Office had maintained “infrequent working-level (second secretary) contact with Muslim Brotherhood members of parliament.” The documents conceded that this approach had been “noticed by the Egyptian authorities who made clear their displeasure,” prompting the Foreign Office to downscale its engagement with the Brotherhood to such a level that it had “only occasional contacts with MB [Muslim Brotherhood] members including one or two contacts with parliamentarians and random unplanned encounters.”<sup>75</sup> This is confirmed by internal Foreign Office correspondence released under the Freedom of Information Act which reveals that although contact was scaled back, it nonetheless continued “up until June 2003.” Yet, although the FCO was ostensibly reducing the extent of its contact with the Brotherhood, the correspondence reveals that “contacts were not restricted to elected PA [People’s Assembly] members.” Instead, members of the Foreign Office also “met the Supreme Guide of the time, Ma’moun al-Hodeibi, and other prominent MB activists, such as Essam al-Aryan [sic], none of whom were in the PA.”<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, the suspension of contact that finally occurred in 2003 did not long endure. Documents published by Policy Exchange reveal that there were renewed calls within the FCO to engage with political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood by mid-2005. Those favouring re-engagement were given added impetus following a private conference in Paris, which had been convened earlier that year. There, the tone for proceedings was set by Olivier Roy, a French academic, who argued that “previous western policy towards Islamists—containment and

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<sup>74</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*, May 12, 2006, Column 627W; *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*, May 23, 2006: Column 1325

<sup>75</sup> “Egypt: Contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood” (January 17, 2006) Document 4 in M. Bright, *When progressives treat with reactionaries: The British State’s flirtation with radical Islamism* (Policy Exchange, 2006); See also “Egypt: Contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood,” Memorandum to Dr. Howells, January 17, 2006 [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]; and, M. Bright, “Talking to terrorists,” *New Statesman*, February 20, 2006.

<sup>76</sup> Correspondence, January 23, 2006 [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

repression—had been a failure.” Instead, he counselled participants to “consider how to integrate Islamists.” His advice found a sympathetic audience among the Foreign Office mandarins present. Internal documents reveal that they favoured “taking engagement forward,” claiming that “in many MENA countries Islamist movements form the principal structured opposition.” Such beliefs gave rise to more than just discursive meetings. A more promiscuous and active embrace of Islamism followed. In fact, the suggestion was made that because “Islamist groups are often less corrupt than the generality of the societies in which they operate, consideration might be given to channelling aid resources through them.”<sup>77</sup>

This sanguine approach was not shared by all. Within days of the meeting Sir Derek Plumbly, then the British Ambassador to Egypt, raised concerns. Acknowledging that “it is desirable to talk to Islamists if we can,” he warned “there will be relatively few contexts in which we are able significantly to influence the Islamists’ agenda.” Plumbly argued against the “tendency for us to be drawn towards engagement for its own sake; to confuse ‘engaging with the Islamic world’ with ‘engaging with Islamism’; and to play down the very real downsides for us in terms of the Islamists’ likely foreign and social policies, should they actually achieve power in countries such as Egypt.” In Plumbly’s view it was better for the Foreign Office to work towards other objectives—such as democratic reform and respect for the rule of law and human rights. The Brotherhood and other Islamist groups, he reasoned, should only be engaged through specific initiatives focused around those clear aims, rather than as part of an effort to engage with political Islam simply as a “matter of principle.”<sup>78</sup>

The Ambassador’s advice went unheeded. A memorandum prepared for Kim Howells in January 2006 confirmed a decisive shift in policy. It described an increase in “the frequency of working-level contacts with Muslim Brotherhood parliamentarians (who do not advocate violence), particularly those who are members of parliamentary committees.” Indeed, the FCO was now so convinced of the virtues of engaging the Brotherhood that it advised the government to “encourage other countries to adopt a similar policy of engagement, including the EU and U.S.” This may have had some sway in Washington, where it was observed “The U.S. are reviewing their position on contacts with the MB, having previously refused any contact.”<sup>79</sup>

The rationale for the shift in policy seemed clear. Egyptian parliamentary elections held in late 2005 were said to have shown the extent of popular support for the Muslim Brotherhood. Candidates from the movement had stood as independents, winning 88 seats in the People’s Assembly—equivalent to about 20 percent of all available seats (by contrast, the ruling National Democratic

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<sup>77</sup> A. McKee, “Engaging with Islamists in the Arab World: Paris Round-Table – 1 June,” to F. Guy, June 7, 2005 [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

<sup>78</sup> “Engaging with Islamists” Sir Derek Plumbly, to John Sawers, Director General (Political), FCO, (June 23, 2005), Document 2 in M. Bright, *When progressives treat with reactionaries: The British State’s flirtation with radical Islamism* (Policy Exchange, 2006)

<sup>79</sup> Significantly, both of these sections were redacted from the Freedom of Information version, but can be seen in the version in Bright, as “Document 4.”

Party (NDP) had taken approximately 70 percent of the seats), a result which suggested the Muslim Brotherhood was growing in influence.<sup>80</sup> That was the prevailing attitude within the Foreign Office at the time. “Political Islamist groups and parties continue to strengthen,” the Directorate of Strategy and Information observed. “Political repression and economic limitations ha[d] created popular grievances which Islamists, which their mosque networks and deep roots within populations, ha[d] been well placed to respond to.” It was also noted that social welfare programs offered by groups like the Brotherhood had, in the eyes of the public, “given them a degree of legitimacy.”<sup>81</sup> Another FCO memorandum declared that Islamists represented “the only viable opposition” in Egypt.<sup>82</sup>

Many within the British Foreign Office now appeared to be convinced. According to one official, the Muslim Brotherhood constituted “a political force” with whom “it is no longer possible for us to maintain a policy of minimal contact.” The British embassy in Cairo was advised that in order to promote democracy it should “engage with the largest *and most effective* opposition group.”<sup>83</sup> The same memorandum again reiterated the idea that engaging with these groups would allow western governments to gain influence and purchase over them:

Engaging with movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood will help increase our understanding of ‘political Islam’ generally, as well as in the specific Egyptian context... Incremental enhancement of contacts may help in discouraging radicalisation. Interacting with ‘political Islam’ is an important element of our Engaging with the Islamic World strategy and we should be trying to influence these groups.<sup>84</sup>

This advice was widely supported by a number of different departments within the FCO including the Arab-Israel North Africa Group (AINAG), the British Embassy in Cairo, and the aforementioned EIWG. Their collective assessment was that the Brotherhood should not be considered a terrorist organization although “The intellectual, political and geographical milieu [sic] which the MB inhabits means [sic] that there will always be members who move to more violent activity, even terrorism, in other organisations.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> For FCO analysis of the elections, see memorandum, “Democracy and freedom, chapter 9” [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

<sup>81</sup> Directorate of Strategy and Information, FCO, “Democratic Reform in the Middle East and North Africa,” March 31, 2006 [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

<sup>82</sup> “Reform in the Arab World: Could the UK be doing more?” [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

<sup>83</sup> “Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi” (July 14, 2005) Document 4 in M. Bright, *When progressives treat with reactionaries: The British State’s flirtation with radical Islamism* (Policy Exchange, 2006). Notably, these words were redacted from the version of the document released to the authors under a Freedom of Information Act request.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> A. McKee to M. Nevin (EIWG), “Egypt: The Muslim Brotherhood—Terrorists?” July 19, 2005 [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

Kim Howells and the then Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, agreed with these recommendations and authorized greater levels of contact.<sup>86</sup> A memorandum from February 2006 confirmed a new policy of “outreach to moderate Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood.”<sup>87</sup> The counterterrorism impetus behind these efforts was confirmed in a letter sent by Sir Derek Plumbly to Peter Gooderham, who led the MENA department in the FCO, where he specifically referred to “developing contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood in line with our new policy.”<sup>88</sup> That policy was the furthering of Prevent objectives.

As a result, the policy of engagement was taken forward—albeit cautiously, for fear of damaging relations with Mubarak’s administration.<sup>89</sup> To guard against accusations of impropriety diplomats were told “to engage only with MB parliamentarians, in their parliamentary capacity.”<sup>90</sup> Weeks after the FCO initiated this policy, the Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, had a meeting with his Egyptian counterpart from the Interior Ministry, General Habib al-Adli. In an effort to play down the change in policy, Clarke told him “the British Government was not seeking to encourage the MB but it was our standard policy to have contact, when appropriate, with all elements of a Parliament.”<sup>91</sup>

However, it seems clear that the policy was actually much more expansive than Clarke had suggested. A diplomat from the British embassy attended a meeting of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Egyptian Parliament in May 2006, whose members included Youssri Ta’leeb, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Although the meeting was critical about aspects of British foreign policy, it was reported that “the vibes—even from the MB... were welcoming and friendly.”<sup>92</sup> British officials also discussed the issue of constitutional reform in Egypt with two parliamentary members of the Brotherhood later that year.<sup>93</sup>

Anxiety within Mubarak’s government grew. Already unhappy with electoral gains secured by the Brotherhood, the nature of these increased contacts upset the Egyptian regime further. In the months that followed it cracked down heavily on the movement, in what the group itself believed

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<sup>86</sup> “Egypt: Contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood,” January 19, 2006; “Egypt: Contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood,” AINAG, January 23, 2006. [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

<sup>87</sup> Untitled document, February 13, 2006. See also, Engaging with the Islamic World Group, “Untitled document,” April 5, 2006 [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

<sup>88</sup> Sir Derek Plumbly, Cairo Letter to Peter Gooderham, February 8, 2006. [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

<sup>89</sup> “Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi” (July 14, 2005) Document 4 in M. Bright, *When progressives treat with reactionaries: The British State’s flirtation with radical Islamism* (Policy Exchange, 2006).

<sup>90</sup> Middle East and North Africa Research Group/British Embassy, Cairo, “Egypt: The Risks Ahead,” August 2006 [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request].

<sup>91</sup> Note of Meeting between Home Secretary and General Habib Al-Adli, Egyptian Interior Minister, February 22, 2006. [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

<sup>92</sup> “Egypt: Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee,” Cairo to London, May 17, 2006. [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

was the worst wave of repression against it for more than a decade. Several hundred Muslim Brothers, including a number of leadership figures such as Essam El-Erian and Mohammed Mursi—now Egypt’s President—were imprisoned.<sup>94</sup> Pressure on the group continued throughout 2006 and 2007.<sup>95</sup> Notwithstanding this, the British embassy in Cairo concluded that, “despite repression the Muslim Brotherhood is becoming more confident and strident.”<sup>96</sup> Privately, the British embassy also urged the Egyptian government to allow “space for opposition” and stressed “the danger of driving the MBs [Muslim Brothers] underground.”<sup>97</sup>

This burgeoning relationship was put to the test during Hezbollah’s war with Israel during summer 2006. The Brotherhood enthusiastically backed Hezbollah in the conflict, describing the capture of Israeli soldiers as a “heroic act.”<sup>98</sup> The Lebanese people were also urged to rally behind Hezbollah, offering the movement whatever support they could. Despite this, the notion that the Brotherhood was a group with whom the British government could—and indeed should—do business continued to gather momentum. Indeed, the following year, the House of Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs effectively reaffirmed the premise on which the government’s engagement strategy was based. “As long as the Muslim Brotherhood expresses a commitment to the democratic process and non-violence” it stated, “we recommend that the British Government should engage with it and seek to influence its members.”<sup>99</sup> Although the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Mark Malloch Brown, later told the Egyptian Foreign Minister that Britain would only deal with “legitimate entities”—the policy of engaging the Brotherhood was far from abandoned. Rather, it endured—though not without generating opposition.

### **Toward a Values-Led Approach**

The strategy of engaging with Islamism—whether at home or abroad, whether under the auspices of Prevent or a pro-democratization agenda—was controversial. Criticism came from both sides of the political spectrum. Within the Labour government that held office until 2010, objections were raised by the Prime Minister himself as well as several other Ministers including Ruth Kelly, Hazel Blears,

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. See also, Egypt: PM/Ministerial Visit to UK,” Cairo to London, March 13, 2006; “Egypt: Uncertain Prospects for Political Reforms,” Cairo to London, March 30, 2006 [FCO documents in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request].

<sup>95</sup> See, for example: “Brotherhood mass arrests,” Cairo Internal Minuting, February 15, 2007; “Human Rights,” Cairo to London, February 26, 2007; “A New Constitution,” Cairo to London, March 21, 2007; “Shura Council Elections,” Cairo to London, May 17, 2007; “Human Rights—An Overview,” Cairo to London, June 11, 2007 [FCO documents in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request].

<sup>96</sup> “Secretary of State’s visit to Egypt: Scene setter,” Cairo to London, August 31, 2008. [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

<sup>97</sup> Plumbly, “The Government bears down on the Muslim Brothers,” Cairo to London, January 23, 2007. [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

<sup>98</sup> “Gaza/Lebanon/Israel: Egypt,” Cairo to London, July 16, 2006. [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request.]

<sup>99</sup> *House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Global Security: The Middle East, Eighth Report of Session 2006–07* (July 2007) HC363

and Denis MacShane. Journalists considered on the left, such as Martin Bright and Nick Cohen, were also vociferous in arguing against the cultivation of unfettered relationships with Islamists. Their view was that British policy, on all fronts, should greater reflect British values when countering ideological and extremist threats.

The growing influence of such views can be seen in the aforementioned shift in the character of the government's Prevent strategy that took place after 2006. Symptomatic of this was the then Home Secretary Jacqui Smith's decision to increase the powers of border security agents in early 2008, in order to exclude extremists. One notable casualty of this decision was Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who was now barred from entering the country—a move he later attributed to the influence of “Zionist” and “neo-conservative” lobbies.<sup>100</sup> By refusing entry, Smith was effectively expressing her preference for a more robust values-led approach to countering extremists. Further confirmation of this was provided at the annual Prevent Conference in December 2008, when Smith spoke of the need to oppose “anti-democratic ideology” by challenging “extremists,” and not just “violent extremists.”<sup>101</sup>

Thus, British policy was somewhat schizophrenic in nature. On the one hand, it is clear that many officials were prepared to sanction and pursue contacts—of varying form—with individuals like Yusuf al-Qaradawi, as well as groups like the MCB, MAB and broader Muslim Brotherhood. Equally, there was growing protests from those who doubted the wisdom and efficacy of such an approach. Crucially, the last two years have now seen a major shift in favour of the latter.

When in opposition, David Cameron had come to view Labour as having adopted an all too promiscuous embrace of Islamist movements. In a speech to the Community Security Trust in 2008, Cameron explained how normative British values should be better reflected in government policy:

The message should be clear: to those who reject democracy; to those who preach hate; to those who encourage violence; you are not part of the mainstream. You will not get public funding. You are not a welcome part of our society. We will only defeat the extremist mindset if we understand and confront it.<sup>102</sup>

Soon after Cameron formed a coalition government in May 2010, it was announced that the grant making dimension of the Preventing Violent Extremism initiative—the primary vehicle by which groups like the MAB were funded—was to be scrapped. In addition, the government also announced overall responsibility for Prevent would be moved from the Department for Communities and Local Government to the Home Office.<sup>103</sup> Cameron then commissioned Lord Carlile to conduct an independent review into the way Prevent had been run. Finally, the Prime

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<sup>100</sup> “Doha: Protest at Embassy against Qaradawi Visa Refusal.” [FCO document in possession of authors as result of Freedom of Information Request]

<sup>101</sup> Home Secretary Jacqui Smith's speech at the Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism, December 10, 2008.

<sup>102</sup> David Cameron speech to the Community Security Trust, March 3, 2008.

<sup>103</sup> “Ministers dismantle £60m programme to prevent violent extremism,” *Guardian*, July 13, 2010



Minister gave his clearest exposition of the new manner in which the coalition would treat Prevent matters going forward when he addressed the Munich Security Conference in 2011. There, he emphasized the importance of tackling extremism per se, rather than just violent extremism—a feature of the previous administration’s approach that had attracted much criticism. In underscoring this shift, Cameron explicitly cited “Islamist extremism”—which he clearly distinguished from the religion of Islam—as a major problem.<sup>104</sup>

The publication of Lord Carlile’s review in June 2011 highlighted many of the problem areas which the Prime Minister had aimed to address in his Munich speech. For example, it acknowledged that there had previously been “cases where groups whom we would now consider to support an extremist ideology have received funding.”<sup>105</sup> This, it was accepted, had proved deeply controversial and upsetting to members of the public who felt their taxes were supporting those opposed to normative British values. More significantly, it was also argued that Prevent needed to be recast with a much greater focus on tackling the ideological aspect of extremist belief. “Preventing terrorism will mean challenging extremist (and non-violent) ideas that are also part of a terrorist ideology,” Lord Carlile’s report argued.<sup>106</sup> In a considerable advance on previous Prevent documents, extremism itself was defined as:

...vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas.<sup>107</sup>

As a result, three new priorities were established for Prevent. These were to:

- respond to the ideological challenge;
- prevent people from being drawn into terrorism; and
- work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalization.<sup>108</sup>

In addition, responsibility for delivery would now be coordinated by the Office for Security and Counter-terrorism (OSCT) based in the Home Office, and channelled through one of three main areas: local authorities, policing, and international work.

The new Prevent strategy consequently continues to afford an important role to the FCO. Indeed, it states quite explicitly that working with “Saudi Arabia and Egypt, whose Muslim institutions and organisations have considerable global influence... can positively or negatively shape the Prevent

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<sup>104</sup> Prime Minister’s speech to Munich security conference, February 5, 2011

<sup>105</sup> *Report to the Home Secretary of Independent Oversight of Prevent Review and Strategy*, May, 2011.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*.

agenda. We believe this work can have a very significant impact here.”<sup>109</sup> This would appear to leave open the possibility of further engagement with groups aligned to the Muslim Brotherhood if it is deemed necessary for the realization of domestic Prevent objectives. However, as the British government’s response to the Arab Spring has shown, it is clear that a much more robust values-led approach has been adopted.

### **New Realities: Responding to the Arab Spring**

The events of the Arab Spring clearly posed challenges to the Foreign Office. On the one hand, the government is keen to support what it hopes will be the development of liberal and representative democracies in the region after decades of oppressive dictatorship. At the same time, officials are wary of the dangers posed by unconditionally embracing changes that may yet give rise to regimes which are as brutal and unstable as those they have succeeded. The Foreign Minister, William Hague, has consistently offered cautious support for Arab revolutions since events in Tunisia began unfolding. The fall of Hosni Mubarak and Muammar Gaddafi were also welcomed, accompanied by more muted calls for an orderly transition in Yemen, and exasperation over the violence in Syria. At the same time, Hague has publicly recognized the limitations of foreign influence and the right of sovereign states to national self-determination. “The first, and most fundamental principle, is that we cannot dictate change from the outside, and nor would we want to,” he told an audience at the London School of Economics in March 2012. “These are not our revolutions, and that we cannot determine the future of these countries.”<sup>110</sup> These comments implicitly hedged against the prospect of a fundamentalist administration taking power in Egypt, acknowledging there was little Whitehall could do in such an event, other than to check its influence through existing relationships and international bodies.

The legitimacy conferred by electoral success obviously makes overt criticism of newly-empowered Islamists more difficult. As a result, Hague conceded that “in recent elections in Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt, political parties inspired by Islam have done very well at the ballot box. [...] We do not underestimate the challenges and stresses this may introduce, or the concerns felt by many people in these countries themselves.”<sup>111</sup> He emphasized that the government would “support and respect the choices made by the people of the region through their vote.”<sup>112</sup> Such support, however, would not be unconditional; for Hague also articulated a commitment to a values-led approach to policy, stating:

We will continue to urge all governments in the region to ensure respect for universal human rights in their constitutions and societies.

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<sup>109</sup> *Prevent Strategy*, June 2011, Cm 8092. See also, *Report to the Home Secretary of Independent Oversight of Prevent Review and Strategy*, May, 2011.

<sup>110</sup> Foreign Secretary William Hague address to the London School of Economics event, “International Policy Responses to Change in the Arab World,” March, 2012.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*

[...]

We will judge them on their actions, including human rights, and the true measure of the strides made by those countries who have embraced democracy will be whether governments are prepared to surrender power if they are rejected at the ballot box. This is the ultimate form of accountability.<sup>113</sup>

Such comments reflected Hague's readiness to accept the new dispensation arising from the Arab Spring—which requires dealing with the Brotherhood and other Islamist parties, but only on the basis of certain non-negotiable conditions. Hague further elucidated this position when he stated “We engage with all political groups, including those inspired by Islam that reject violence, accept democratic principles and abide by existing international agreements.”<sup>114</sup> In itself this may seem an unambitious statement, demanding only the most basic of commitments. Yet, Hague elaborated that “respect for human rights and dignity, including freedom of expression and equality of women, are universal values that must underline all political systems—there are no justified exceptions.”<sup>115</sup>

That view was shared among Hague's ministerial colleagues. The Conservative Foreign Office Minister, Alistair Burt, offered a still more forthright assessment of what the Foreign Office expects:

We will engage with any group that upholds the democratic process and the values that we champion. This includes the rights of ethnic and religious minorities and of women. [...] Democracy is not just about elections. For people's demands to be fulfilled, their human rights need to be constitutionally and legally guaranteed.<sup>116</sup>

To realize this vision, the Foreign Office has created the Arab Partnership—which it describes as “proactive foreign policy”—to coordinate Britain's strategic response to the Arab Spring.<sup>117</sup> Its stated “overarching aim” is to achieve “politically and economically open and inclusive societies in the MENA region.”<sup>118</sup> The scheme was officially launched in February 2011 by William Hague and is led by the Foreign Office, while being supported by the Department for International Development (DFID). Overall, the FCO and DFID are responsible for managing a joint fund of £110m over four years, with £40m coming from the FCO and £70m from DFID's Arab Partnership Economic Facility (APEF) fund.<sup>119</sup> Money from the Foreign Office is specifically dedicated to promoting three key objectives which include: political participation, public voice and freedom of expression, and good governance where the latter includes a commitment to the rule of

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid

<sup>114</sup> Ibid

<sup>115</sup> Ibid

<sup>116</sup> Remarks by Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt at the Minnesota International Center in Minneapolis, MN, January, 2012.

<sup>117</sup> “10 things to know about the Arab Partnership,” FCO website.

<sup>118</sup> “The Arab Partnership Strategy,” FCO website

<sup>119</sup> “Arab Partnership: Leading the UK government's strategic response to the Arab Spring,” FCO website.

law, transparency, integrity, tackling corruption and the building of effective and accountable institutions.<sup>120</sup> By contrast, the APEF fund will seek to promote economic reform while also working with international financial institutions.<sup>121</sup>

In order to achieve its goals, the Arab Partnership will seek to:

- Promote and advocate political support for reform in the region, both bilaterally and with the international community
- Support the delivery of transformative programs and approaches in the region from the EU, G8, international financial institutions and Gulf donors which provide appropriate support, and incentives for reform in transitioning states
- Deliver a targeted, high-impact UK-led bilateral program of support for reformers in the region through the Arab Partnership Fund.<sup>122</sup>

In line with this, the Arab Partnership currently supports 50 projects in ten different countries, including Egypt.<sup>123</sup> These projects will, by definition, be of a long-term nature. This reflects a persisting belief in the Foreign Office that the Arab Spring will deliver a more prosperous and stable region even though the path to its realization will be invariably uneven. “There will be an Arab Summer” Sir Mark Grant, Britain’s ambassador to the United Nations, emphatically told an audience at Chatham House. “It will be chaotic and it will be uneven, and it may take a generation to get from Spring to Summer, but it will happen right across the region.”<sup>124</sup> To that end, the Arab Partnership is seeking a multifaceted approach to achieving enduring political and economic reform in the region. “This work matters, both to the people of the region and to wider international peace, security and prosperity” explains a document on the initiative.<sup>125</sup>

## Conclusion

These recent developments, then, mark a new and fundamental recalibration of British policy regarding Islamists, both at home and abroad. Whereas sections of government, particularly within the Foreign Office, embraced Islamist movements in a rather uncritical fashion in the aftermath of 9/11—and especially after 7/7—the Conservative-led coalition government has indicated a more robust approach. One result is the revised Prevent strategy of 2011. With regards to foreign relations, the favoured approach in Whitehall is now to achieve maximum leverage by holding Islamist governments accountable over basic values.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid

<sup>121</sup> Ibid

<sup>122</sup> Ibid

<sup>123</sup> “10 things to know about the Arab Partnership,” FCO website.

<sup>124</sup> UK Ambassador Sir Mark Lyall Grant's speech at Chatham House: “Is there an Arab Summer? The UN's response to the Arab Spring,” June 2011.

<sup>125</sup> Arab Partnership: “Leading the UK government’s strategic response to the Arab Spring,” FCO website

This is not to confuse prudent and conditional engagement with pessimism. Hague has already declared the government's commitment to working with elected representatives in Egypt—including those inspired by Islam—but on the condition they eschew violence and respect existing treaties. This is the prism through which British foreign policy will now interact with its counterparts in Cairo. "To say that Arab Spring has turned into cold winter is wrong," Hague has warned. "The Arab Spring was always going to be a long process, not an instant fix. It was bound to take different forms in each country. The staging of genuine elections in countries that have been denied them for decades is significant. But it is what happens after elections that will determine success or failure."<sup>126</sup>

Such comments may represent a necessary accommodation to the new realities emerging since early 2011—and the recognition of the legitimacy conferred on Islamists by their successes at the ballot box. This is not to say that popular sentiment always delivers responsible government, as the lessons of the twentieth century clearly have demonstrated. Yet, an outright refusal to acknowledge Islamist administrations would be perceived as undermining Britain's commitment to democratic advances in the region. It may be that this values-led approach offers Britain as much leverage as it can hope to gain, in Egypt and elsewhere, in the years ahead.

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<sup>126</sup> William Hague, "Freedom is still flowering in the Arab Spring," *The Times*, January 13, 2012.

## Canada and the Arab Islamists: *Plus ça change...*

By Alex Wilner

Canada is a curious political animal. It is a stalwart democracy and a leading economic and energy powerhouse, a founding member of the UN, NATO and the G7/8, and a member of both the Commonwealth of Nations (i.e. the British Commonwealth) and its French counterpart, *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie*. It has built, on its own terms, a special relationship with most of the world's great powers. And it stands proudly by its military history (from the First and Second World Wars to the 2011 Libyan intervention) but pays equal homage to the role it played in establishing the UN's "peacekeeping" function (which Canadian Foreign Minister and future Prime Minister, Lester Pearson, first proposed in 1956 in response to the Suez Crisis) and the UN's *Responsibility to Protect* (R2P) principle (the product of a 2000 Canadian initiative co-written by Canadian scholar and want-to-be Prime Minister, Michael Ignatieff). In sum, Canada is a widely respected international leader. And yet, paradoxically, despite its ability to influence, direct, and lead global affairs, Canada rarely does. It remains a cautious nation with a small and tidy international footprint.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Canada's patchy (and at times, non-existent) relationship with the Islamist political forces currently rising in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Though Canadians abhor despotism and cheer democratic reform, they seem perplexed by the revolutions that have rocked the MENA region, and uncertain, as to what the Islamists represent and how their rise to power will affect individual MENA countries, the region more broadly, and Canadian interests more specifically. And yet, Canadian policies concerning the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood, and other regional Islamist forces, seem to perpetuate and uphold Canada's historic policy positions *vis-à-vis* the old Arab guard: more open, accountable, and inclusive political (and economic) liberalization is desired; the protection of human rights and of religious and sexual minorities and women is a necessity; and regional stability that includes a resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict remains a priority. It is likely that no matter the political futures of Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and their neighbors, and no matter how well Islamists place in general and presidential elections, that Canada's foreign policy will echo that of years past. For Canadians, *plus ça change ... plus c'est la même chose* (the more things change the more they stay the same).

This chapter will do three things. First, it will briefly explore Canadian attitudes *vis-à-vis* political Islam. It will focus on recent history, and especially the decade since 9/11. While relying on such a shallow historical narrative certainly truncates the history of Islamic political thought, like much of the Western world (but perhaps even more so than in Europe and the United States), most Canadians were only introduced to political Islam as a result of al Qaeda's violent extremism. Rightly or wrongly, political violence rather than Islamist political thought has informed Canadian associations with (ostensibly) non-violent Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood. Second, Canadian positions during the Arab Spring and regarding the recent and forthcoming

elections in the MENA region will be reviewed. Special attention will be paid to Canada's concerns for human rights, which informed its participation in NATO's 2011 Libyan campaign. Third, this chapter will attempt to sketch the future of Canadian relations with Islamist parties and rulers. The conclusion suggests that unless Canada's primary foreign policy concerns (i.e. democratization, human rights, and regional stability) are challenged or if incoming Islamist political parties dramatically alter the current status quo, Canadian relations with the new MENA governments will remain generally unfazed.

### **The Past: A Rude Awakening**

Historically, Canada has had very little structured dealings with the Muslim Brotherhood or political Islam more generally. Unlike various European countries, which are geographically and socially linked to the MENA region, and unlike the United States, which has critical national interests on a global scale, Canada has traditionally maintained little reason to engage itself in political Islam's theological affairs or strategic backyard. Ottawa has been neither for, nor against, political developments among Muslim and Islamic communities. Indeed, these sorts of developments rarely appear on Canada's radar. And when they do, Canada seldom acts alone to address them. Rather, Canadian policies have been developed multilaterally in concert with Canada's various allies and friends—as is usually the case in Canadian foreign affairs.

For illustration, consider Canadian-Iranian relations. Ottawa's relationship with Tehran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution followed general trends and concerns shared by other Western capitals. Only when Canadian interests were specifically challenged—as happened recently with the 2003 rape, torture, and beating death of Iranian-Canadian photojournalist, Zahra Kazemi, who was killed, the Canadian government emphasizes, “in an Iranian prison by regime officials”—has Ottawa unilaterally taken forceful, and at times provocative, measures.<sup>1</sup> In the Kazemi case, Canada, under both Liberal and Conservative Party leadership, has called for an official investigation; sought to establish an international forensics team to examine her body; demanded that her remains be repatriated; rejected Iran's handling of the criminal investigation and subsequent trials; repeatedly recalled its ambassador from Tehran; held Parliamentary subcommittee hearings on the case; and formally tightened its “Controlled Engagement Policy” with Iran, which downgraded bilateral relations and limited official contact between the two countries to concerns over Iran's violation of human rights, the Kazemi case, and nuclear proliferation issues.<sup>2</sup> Canada eventually severed relations with Iran in September 2012, closing its Embassy in Tehran and expelling Iranian diplomats from Canada.<sup>3</sup> Canadian courts have also signaled that Kazemi's Canadian relatives have the legal right to

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Canada, “Canada-Iran Relations: Fact Sheet,” Accessed December 2012, ([http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/iran/bilateral\\_relations\\_bilaterales/canada-iran.aspx?lang=eng&view=d](http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/iran/bilateral_relations_bilaterales/canada-iran.aspx?lang=eng&view=d))

<sup>2</sup> *CBC News*, “Zahra Kazemi: Iran's Changing Story,” November 27, 2007; Government of Canada, Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, 40<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, Number 015, April 30, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Laura Payton, “Canada Closes Embassy in Iran, Expels Iranian Diplomats”, *CBC News*, September 7, 2012.

sue Iran and its leaders, including Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, for culpability in her death.<sup>4</sup> There are numerous and obvious differences between Iran's current political system and the one the Muslim Brotherhood and their associates are establishing in Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere. The Canadian-Iranian example is not meant to force a parallel between them. But Canada's response to Iran's human rights record certainly does suggest the manner in which the Canadian government might react to similar developments occurring elsewhere in the MENA region in the wake of the Arab Spring.

Not surprisingly, Canadian citizens have themselves historically approached Islamist political movements in a similar fashion to their governments. They have expressed reserved curiosity until matters required their attention. On September 11, 2001, al Qaeda killed 24 Canadians. It was the largest loss of Canadian life in a single act of terrorism since the 1985 bombing of Air India Flight 182. And it shaped Canadian assessments of political Islam for much of the following decade. This is not to suggest that Canadians were unfamiliar with Islam or Muslims before 2001. Indeed, they were. Canada, as a leading destination for immigrants, including those from the Muslim and Arab world, has a vibrant and growing Muslim community. The 2001 national census found that 580,000 Canadians (of a total 29.6 million population) identified as Muslim.<sup>5</sup> Canada's largest cities, like Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa, each have sizable, organized, and active Muslim communities. Mosques, halal establishments, and Muslim religious, cultural and educational organizations make up part of Canada's cultural and religious mosaic. Consider that even in Alberta—long a bastion of Canadian conservatism—a Muslim-Canadian, Naheed Nenshi, was elected mayor of Calgary. Or consider that between 2007 and 2012, one of Canada's most popular television sitcoms—which aired on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), Canada's publically funded version of the BBC—was *Little Mosque on the Prairie*. Canadians are no strangers to Islam.

But until 9/11, political Islam was not a topic Canadians were particularly familiar with and religiously inspired political violence was not a national security concern. That sort of conflict usually occurred “over there,” far from Canada's shores and away from Canadian interests. With 9/11, however, Canadians found themselves in the crosshairs, and like other Westerners, they sought broader perspectives to help them untangle the socio-religious ideologies and political motivations that underpinned al Qaeda's violence. The debates Canadians eventually held concerning political Islam were necessarily colored by militant Islamism. And now that movements and political parties associated with the Muslim Brotherhood are taking power in North Africa and the Middle East,

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<sup>4</sup> See the various documents compiled by the Canadian Center for International Justice, “CCIJ's Public Cases and Interventions: Zahra Kazemi,” accessed December 2012, [http://ccij.ca/programs/cases/index.php?WEBYEP\\_DI=10](http://ccij.ca/programs/cases/index.php?WEBYEP_DI=10).

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada, “Population by Religions, by Province and Territory,” (2001 Census). Data collected by the Pew Forum places the population at roughly 900,000 for 2010. See Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “The Future of the Global Muslim Population”, January 2011, accessed December 2012, <http://features.pewforum.org/muslim-population/?sort=Pop2010>.



these early debates will likely continue to influence Canadian positions and policies. Five recent cases are worth exploring.

First, Canada's participation in the Afghan conflict was primarily centered on combatting the Taliban, destroying al Qaeda, and establishing a viable and indigenous democratic system that could effectively inoculate Afghans against militant Islamist ideologies. By 2006, Canada had taken a leadership role in southern Afghanistan's Kandahar province, committing roughly 2,500 Canadian Forces (CF) and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) personnel to reverse gains achieved by the Taliban insurgency.<sup>6</sup> Committing Canadian troops to the Afghan mission protected Afghans and Canadians alike by dislodging the Taliban and keeping al Qaeda on the run. Without a base of operations, Canadians believed, al Qaeda could not easily conduct international attacks that might again kill and injure Canadians. "These are detestable murderers and scumbags," explained General Rick Hillier, Chief of Defence Staff of the Canadian Forces, "we're not going to let those radical murderers and killers rob from others and certainly we're not going to let them rob from Canada."<sup>7</sup> Defeating proponents of a militant Islamist ideology that was responsible for 9/11 and working under a UN mandate and alongside other NATO allies, Canadians were compelled to send soldiers overseas. The conversation Canadians have since had about their evolving role in Afghanistan has revolved around combatting militant political Islam and stabilizing the country. As an interesting aside, a very similar debate is currently unfolding with regards to Canada's responsibility to bolster international efforts to confront the militant Islamists of northern Mali.<sup>8</sup>

Second, between 2004 and 2005, a debate took place in Quebec and Ontario regarding Sharia Law. In short, the debates centered on the extent religious-based arbitration panels using Sharia would be allowed to be consulted to settle family-based legal disputes. The issue sparked a ferocious intellectual debate that spilled into heated street demonstrations. Opponents suggested that empowering Sharia in Canada would weaken the separation between "church and state," blurring the line between religion and secular liberal democracy. Others argued that under Sharia Law, "men and women are not treated equally."<sup>9</sup> In the end, the Quebec government, in a 2004 motion supported *unanimously* by all members of the National Assembly, barred the use of Sharia Law in Quebec courts. The Quebec government later established the *Bouchard-Taylor Commission* to study the issue of "reasonable accommodation" of religious and cultural minorities more thoroughly. In Ontario, the Sharia debate ended the following year, with Premier Dalton McGuinty stating, "I've come to the conclusion that the debate has gone on long enough. There will be no sharia law in Ontario. There will be one law for all Ontarians."<sup>10</sup> Both debates were widely covered in Canada's

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<sup>6</sup> Nearly 160 Canadians have been killed in Afghanistan, placing Canadian casualties behind only those of the United Kingdom and the United States among Western coalition partners.

<sup>7</sup> General Rick Hillier, quoted in Daniel Leblanc, "JTF2 to Hunt al-Qaeda," *Globe and Mail*, July 15, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Jane Taber, "How Canadian Troops Could End up in Mali," *Globe and Mail*, January 1, 2012; Jane Taber, "Mixed Messages on Mali have Opposition Pressing for Clarity," *Globe and Mail*, December 31, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> *CBC News*, "Shariah Law: Indepth," May 26, 2005

<sup>10</sup> Colin Freeze and Karen Howlett, "McGuinty Government Rules Out Use of Sharia Law," *Globe and Mail*, September 12, 2005.

national and regional newspapers; the general tone was that Sharia was bad for Canadians, bad for women, and bad for democracy.

Third, in 2006, Canadians woke to the threat of Islamist homegrown terrorism. A group of young Canadian Muslims—dubbed the “Toronto 18” —were arrested as they were preparing truck bombs for use against targets in Toronto. During the lengthy trials, it became clear that the group espoused al Qaeda’s vision and sought to kill Canadians in its name. Roughly half of those arrested eventually pled guilty and several others were found guilty in a court of law. Another two dozen Canadians—like Mohammed Jabarah, Mohammad Khawaja, Said Namouh, Tahawwur Rana, Sayfildin Sharif, Hiva Alizadeh, Misbahuddin Ahmed, Khurram Syed Sher, Mohamed Warsame, and various others—have been arrested and/or convicted on similar charges in Canada and overseas. And other Canadian citizens—like Mohamed Hassan Hersi, Ferid Ahmed Imam, Maiwand Yar, Mohammed Elmi Ibrahim, and others—are thought to have travelled to Somalia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and elsewhere to join and train with foreign militant groups. Once again, as a result of each of these cases, the prism through which Canadians interpreted political Islam was infused with political violence, this time the home-grown rather than foreign-grown variant.

Fourth, over the past five years Canadians have debated Muslim religious dress, and specifically, the face veil worn by some Muslim women. Like the debates that have taken place in France, the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, and elsewhere, the niqab and burka are the focal points. In Quebec, the government tabled Bill 94 in 2010, a controversial piece of legislation that lays out the conditions under which women who wear face coverings would be allowed to work in the public sector or do business with Quebec government officials and institutions. In announcing the bill, Quebec Premier Jean Charest argued that “this [bill] is not about making our home less welcoming, but about stressing the values that unite us ... An accommodation cannot be granted unless it respects the principle of equality between men and women, and the religious neutrality of the state.”<sup>11</sup> The bill is still being considered but the prospect of its acceptance would be significant. The legislation could well force women to show their faces when receiving the services offered by government-funded institutions, including public schools, nurseries, and hospitals. Similar debates have occurred elsewhere in Canada. In Ontario, courts have ruled that individuals testifying in a trial must remove their niqab or burka if wearing them “jeopardizes” a fair trial. The ruling was handed down by the Supreme Court of Canada and upheld by the Ontario Court of Appeals in relation to a high-profile Toronto case in which a veiled Muslim woman refused to remove her niqab while testifying in a sexual assault case.<sup>12</sup> And more recently, in 2011, the Canadian federal government announced that Muslim immigrants would be barred from wearing full-facial coverings when taking their oaths of citizenship. The Minister for Citizenship, Immigration, and Multiculturalism, Jason Kenney, explained that “allowing a group to hide their faces while they are becoming members of our

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<sup>11</sup> *Canadian Press*, “Quebec Bans Niqab from Government Services,” March 24, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Kirk Makin, “Niqab must be Removed if Trial Fairness Jeopardized, Court Rules,” *Globe and Mail*, October 13, 2010.

community is counter to Canada's commitment to openness, equality, and social cohesion."<sup>13</sup> Again, all of these cases received detailed media attention across Canada and helped shape national perceptions concerning the role of women in Islam.

Fifth, religiously motivated "honour killings"—in which individuals murder family members (usually young women) for behaviour (usually sexual in nature) that is perceived as having brought shame to the family—appear to be on the rise in Canada. Over a dozen high-profile cases have been reported in recent years.<sup>14</sup> Many of these cases involve immigrant Canadians from Muslim-majority countries who struggle to adapt their "strict old-world ways" to the rights and liberties enjoyed by all Canadians. Herein, younger members of these families some of whom are first-generation Canadians—act in ways that are deemed religiously and culturally inappropriate, "shaming" the more traditional sensitivities of the older generations.<sup>15</sup> In extreme cases, a family member avenges the perceived dishonour by murdering the supposed offender. The more recent cases, like those of Khatera Sadiqi, shot to death by her brother in 2006, Aqsa Parvez, slain in 2007 by her Pakistani-Canadian father and brother, and the 2009 Shafia family murders, in which four women, including three Shafia teenage girls, were killed by their Afghan-Canadian family members, have garnered months of front-page media attention in Canada. Following the 2012 guilty verdicts handed down in the Shafia trial, Ontario Superior Court Judge Robert Maranger argued that, "it is difficult to conceive of a more heinous, more despicable, more honourless crime ... The apparent reason behind these cold-blooded, shameful murders was that the four completely innocent victims offended your completely twisted concept of honour ... that has absolutely no place in any civilized society."<sup>16</sup> His sentiments are likely shared by a vast majority of Canadians, of all religious backgrounds.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the Shafia case was deemed a "shocking wake-up call ... for Canadians Muslims," in particular.<sup>18</sup>

The circumstances surrounding each of these events, and the manner in which they have been debated by Canadians, is important. Since 2000, Canadians have taken leaps and bounds in their understanding of political Islam. But that understanding has been consistently shaped by threats to Canadian security by militant Islamists and by perceived challenges to liberalism, democracy, and the rights of women and minorities by proponents of religious law. Today, with the Muslim Brotherhood surging to electoral power in some of the countries caught-up by the Arab Spring, Canadians are likely to interpret these "new" Islamist movements using their recently-acquired perspectives. If so, no dramatic warming of Canadian foreign relations should be (automatically) expected with the Muslim Brotherhood and its associated parities, notwithstanding their democratic

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<sup>13</sup> *National Post*, "Niqabs, Burkas must be Removed during Citizenship Ceremonies: Jason Kenney," December 12, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Gerald Caplan, "Honour Killings in Canada: Even Worse than we Believe," *Globe and Mail*, July 23, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Tobi Cohen, "Honour Killings on the Rise in Canada: Expert," *Canwest News Service*, June 19, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Timothy Appleby, "Judge Condemns 'sick notion of honour,'" *Globe and Mail*, January 30, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> See, Nazneen Sheikh, "No Culture Experts Required for 'Honour' Crimes," *Globe and Mail*, February 1, 2012; Adnan Khan, "We have Failed to Protect Muslims Women under Threat," *Globe and Mail*, January 31, 2012; Margaret Wentz, "Call Honour Crimes what they are," *Globe and Mail*, January 31, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Sheema Khan, "Shafia Trial a Wake-up Call for Canadian Muslims," *Globe and Mail*, January 30, 2012.

successes. If anything, given their Islamist stripes and given recent Canadian debates, these new governments may be approached by Canada with even more suspicion. And yet, that will not necessarily result in a dramatically altered Canadian foreign policy either. Exploring Canadian reactions to the 2011 Libyan conflict helps illustrate why.

### **The Present: Speak Up, But Carry a Small Stick**

When it became clear that Hosni Mubarak's regime would succumb to the popular protests rocking Egypt, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper quipped: "I think the old expression is: 'They're not going to put the toothpaste back in the tube on this one.'"<sup>19</sup> In all seriousness, however, Prime Minister Harper articulated Canada's position accordingly:

"We stand by the people of Egypt [...] for their steadfast support for the fundamental values that Canadians profoundly share with them [...] Canada supports universal values—including freedom, democracy, and justice—and the right to the freedom of assembly, speech, and information. [...] We encourage all parties to work together to ensure an orderly transition toward a free and vibrant society [...] We urge all parties in Egypt to renounce violence and allow peaceful and meaningful dialogue between the people and government to address political, economic, and social concerns. This dialogue should lead to free and fair elections and a government that supports universal values."<sup>20</sup>

That the focus of Harper's announcement was on democracy, human rights, and regional security was not surprising. To a certain extent, his statement was in keeping with Canada's historical penchant for supporting democracy, stabilizing war zones, safeguarding the rights and freedoms of at-risk communities and minorities, and acting in concert with like-minded states. In Egypt and Tunisia, the revolutions ended successfully and quickly. The loss of civilian life was, comparatively speaking, low, and Canada's concerns were never entirely an issue. But Libya was a different matter. The apprehensions that Canada expressed in regard to Egypt were the same but, in contrast, by February and March 2011 the situation in Libya seemed to be heading towards a humanitarian disaster. Once it became clear that the United States and the major European players were intent on taking action, Canada positioned itself to take a leading role in facilitating the international intervention.

The day after the UN Security Council passed Resolutions 1970, imposing broad sanctions against Libya, Canada responded in kind. It banned the trade of weapons with Libya, imposed a travel ban on Muammar Gaddafi and 15 other Libyan nationals, froze Libya's financial assets in Canada, and—going beyond UN demands but acting in step with the United States and others—prohibited all financial transactions with the Libyan Government, its institutions, and agencies, including the Libyan Central Bank. In describing these actions, Prime Minister Harper condemned Gaddafi

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<sup>19</sup> *Canadian Press*, "Harper: Canada Wants Free and Fair Elections in Egypt," February 11, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Harper, "Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on Recent Events in Egypt," Ottawa, Ontario, February 1, 2011, accessed December 2012, <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=3925>.

personally, calling him the “root cause” for the bloodshed in Libyan and demanded that he “immediately vacate his position and authority.”<sup>21</sup> This echoed demands coming from other western capitals all calling for Gaddafi “to go.”

And again, following the establishment of UNSC Resolution 1973 on March 17, 2011, which authorized the use of military force against Libya, Canada immediately signalled its willingness to participate in the campaign. Canada’s existing operation in Libya (*Operation MOBILE*), which began on February 25, 2011 as a “whole-of-government effort” to evacuate Canadian citizens from Libya, and officially became a combat mission on March 19, two days after the UNSC resolution was passed. It was then further converted and rolled into NATO’s *Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR* three days after that.<sup>22</sup> Canada’s contribution to the conflict included over 600 military personnel, seven CF-18 Hornet fighter jets, three in-flight refuelling tankers, and two CP-140 Aurora patrol aircraft. This was a modest contribution when compared to the forces offered by the United States, UK, and France, but given the size of Canada’s military, it was deemed a major military operation. In total, Canadian aircraft conducted nearly 1,500 sorties, including roughly 950 combat operations. These “numbers don’t tell the whole story,” Prime Minister Harper later pointed out, because “Canadian fighter jets flew [...] roughly 10 percent of all sorties—without caveats—against Gadhafi’s military. Canadians should also know that the taking of Tripoli by rebel forces was materially assisted by the CF-18 missions that cleared away Gadhafi’s remaining mechanized forces.”<sup>23</sup>

Canada contributed in other ways, as well. Two Canadian warships, *HMCS Vancouver* and *HMCS Charlottetown*, were dispatched to help patrol Libya’s coast. They conducted numerous boardings and inspections of suspicious ships and assisted in combat operations. Otherwise, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister, John Baird, travelled to Libya twice while the conflict was ongoing; he was the first allied foreign minister to tour Gadhafi’s fortified compound in Tripoli after it fell to rebel forces. And besides the cost of Canada’s military contribution, reported as \$350 million, Canada also pledged to help finance the post-conflict stabilization.<sup>24</sup> And to top it all off, Lieutenant-General Joseph Jacques Charles Bouchard, a Canadian, was given command of NATO’s entire Libyan operation. He was awarded a U.S. Legion of Merit (his third), a Canadian Meritorious Service Cross,

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<sup>21</sup> Stephen Harper, “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on Implementing Sanctions against Libya,” Ottawa, Ontario, February 27, 2011, accessed December 2012, <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=3997>; Government of Canada, “Legislative Background for New Regulations”, February 25, 2011, accessed December 2012, <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?category=5&featureId=6&pageId=48&id=3998>.

<sup>22</sup> Canadian Department of National Defence, “Operation MOBILE,” accessed December 2012, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/feature-vedette/2011/02/libya-libye-eng.asp>.

<sup>23</sup> *The Canadian Press*, “Harper hails Libya mission as ‘great military success,’” May 11, 2012.

<sup>24</sup> *CBC News*, “Libya mission’s final costs reach \$347M,” May 11, 2012; Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, “Minister Fast Undertakes Trade Mission to Help Canadian Companies Get Back to Business in the New Libya,” January 30, 2012, accessed December 2012, [http://www.international.gc.ca/media\\_commerce/comm/news-communicues/2012/01/30a.aspx?lang=eng&view=d](http://www.international.gc.ca/media_commerce/comm/news-communicues/2012/01/30a.aspx?lang=eng&view=d).

and was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada for his services. As the troops headed home, Harper praised their accomplishments:

“You embody our commitment to international law, to the rights and freedoms we cherish in a democratic society [...] let no one ever question whether Canada is prepared to stay the course in defence of what is right. For we believe that in a world where people look for hope and cry out for freedom, those who talk the talk of human rights must from time to time be prepared to likewise walk the walk.”<sup>25</sup>

Canada, it appeared, had done its part to assist those striving (and dying) for democratic reform under the banner of the Arab Spring. Of importance: Canada’s military participation in Libya came with barely any official debate at all. Only on March 21, two days *after* the government had already accepted a military role for Canada, did Parliament openly discuss the issue. The debate lasted three hours and support for Canada’s military mission was unanimous. Parliamentarians revisited Canada’s military contribution three months later in June, debating a motion to extend the mission into September; only a single “no” vote was recorded. A third Parliamentarian debate was held in September 2011 to discuss again extending the mission; more than two-thirds of Parliament agreed.<sup>26</sup> In sum, Canada’s Libyan mission was deemed necessary and just by a vast majority of Canadians.

Canada’s rationale for participating in the Libyan campaign was primarily a result of the very real threat to civilians stemming from Gaddafi’s intent to “cleanse Libya house by house” of its traitorous “cockroaches.” “I have not yet ordered the use of force,” he warned on February 22, but “when I do, everything will burn.”<sup>27</sup> His intentions seemed clear, and Canada, like others, took him at his word. But open threats would not have been enough to compel Canada to action. That the United States and Canada’s traditional allies, including France, the UK, Italy, and others, were also participating in the UN mandated Libyan campaign, greatly facilitated Canada’s entry. Indeed, without international support, Canada would not have intervened in Libya at all. Importantly, this helps explain Canada’s limited action concerning the civil war in Syria. In contrast to Libya, the deteriorating situation in Syria has yet to garner active Canadian involvement. The conflict, by some estimates, has already resulted in the death of well over 60,000 people (by December 2012), appears to be slipping into a bloody sectarian conflict, and has the potential to spiral into a much larger regional conflict (involving Iran, Hezbollah, Israel, Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, and remnants of al Qaeda). At issue is that the UN Security Council has been divided as to sanctioning international intervention and most Western powers are loath to talk openly about starting a Libyan-style mission over Syria. Such an intervention will be exceptionally high-risk, complex, and complicated. Canada,

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<sup>25</sup> Meagan Fitzpatrick, “Honours for mission to end ‘brutal’ Libyan regime,” *CBC News*, November 24, 2011.

<sup>26</sup> For complete transcripts of the entire debates, see [Openparliament.ca](http://openparliament.ca) (<http://openparliament.ca/debates/2011/>), “March 21,” “June 14,” and “September 26,” accessed December 2012.

<sup>27</sup> *BBC News*, “Libya Protests: Defiant Gaddafi Refuses to Quit,” February 22, 2011

to no one's surprise, has taken a traditional wait-and-see approach. It has followed its friends and allies by shutting its Embassy in Damascus, freezing Syrian assets, prohibiting investment in Syria's petroleum industry, banning all Syrian imports (excluding food products) and all Canadian luxury exports, and expelling, *en masse*, all Syrian diplomats following the particularly gruesome Houla massacre in mid-May 2012.<sup>28</sup> But unless and until Canada's allies muster international support for a more concerted military intervention—as they did in the case of Libya—Canadian troops will remain in their barracks.

### **The Future: Much the Same...Unless**

Given the manner in which Canadians have historically debated political Islam, and considering Canada's broad reaction to the Arab Spring and more focused approach concerning Libya, what might we expect for the future? How will Canadians and Canada respond to the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates in North Africa and the Middle East? While offering prognostications (in print, no less) is a dangerous habit, I want to conclude by suggesting that unless the incoming Islamist parties dramatically alter the political or societal status quo; or purposefully impede further democratic reform; or actively curtail the rights and freedoms of women or minority group; or use violence against vulnerable communities, that Canada's foreign policy with incoming MENA governments will remain generally unfazed. And, underpinning all of this, Canadian policies will almost surely echo those pursued by its friends and allies in the United States, the UK, France, and elsewhere. The bottom line is that what happens next will depend on how the Muslim Brotherhood and associates decide to govern. In Canada's case, two particular developments are worth watching.

The first concerns Israel. At a May 2012 address in Washington, D.C., Foreign Minister Baird said: "Israel has no greater friend in the world than Canada [...] our strong support for Israel is not about politics at home. And it certainly is not about winning popularity contests at the United Nations ... [F]or us it's all about values. Canada and Israel [...] share the same values. We respect freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We have a history of defending the vulnerable, challenging the aggressor and confronting evil."<sup>29</sup> Simply put, Canada is a staunch ally of Israel. While the Canadian media like to suggest that Prime Minister Harper and his Conservative Party have dramatically strengthened Canadian-Israeli ties in recent years, this is only half the story.<sup>30</sup> Past Canadian Prime Ministers from different political parties have also been strong advocates of Israel. And during Shimon Peres's 2012 visit to Canada, the Israeli President was warmly welcomed by the leaders of all three of Canada's major federal political parties. Even Thomas Mulcair, leader of the

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<sup>28</sup> *Associated Press*, "Most Syrians Killed in Massacre Shot at Close Range," May 29, 2012; *CBC News*, "Canada Joins Allies in Mass Expulsion of Syrian Diplomats," May 29, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> John Baird, "Address by Minister Baird to the American Jewish Committee," Washington, D.C., May 3, 2012, accessed December 2012, <http://www.international.gc.ca/media/aff/speeches-discours/2012/05/03a.aspx?lang=eng&view=d>

<sup>30</sup> See for instance: Campbell Clark, "Canada protests 'One-sided' Resolutions with Pro-Israel Stand at UN," *Globe and Mail*, December 22, 2011; Mike Blanchfield, "John Baird Bares Teeth in Offering Canada's Defence of Israel at UN," *Canadian Press*, October 18, 2011; Jeffrey Simpson, "How the Political Shift among Jewish Voters Plays in Canada," *Globe and Mail*, September 28, 2011.

New Democratic Party (NDP) and current leader of the Official Opposition, lent Israel his party's support.<sup>31</sup> The NDP is Canada's leading left-of-center party and is traditionally critical of Israel; that may well change under Mulcair's stewardship.

The bottom line is that Canada will not happily accept dramatic shifts to Arab-Israeli relations. This is especially true in the case of Egypt (and Jordan, too, if the political landscape changes in Amman as well). Following the violent rampage against Israel's embassy in Cairo in September 2011, Prime Minister Harper warned that, "Canada expects Egypt to honour its commitment to uphold its international agreements—including its peace treaty with Israel."<sup>32</sup> This was in keeping with similar demands from Washington, London, and elsewhere. Given the Muslim Brotherhood's views *vis-à-vis* Israel, its penchant to threaten the Camp David Accords to attract support, and its historic relationship with Hamas and other regional militants, Harper's warning was not idle talk.<sup>33</sup> Were Egypt's new leaders to radically alter its foreign policy with Israel, Canada would likely react strongly.

The second issue involves the treatment of minority communities and women. Recent attacks against Copts in Egypt, like the 2011 attacks in Alexandria, Imbaba, Maspiro, and elsewhere, have deeply troubled Canadians. "The Government of Canada strongly condemns the violence against Coptic Christians in Egypt," Prime Minister Harper stated in May 2011. "Canada is a tolerant, multicultural country with a proud tradition of defending religious minorities around the world. We stand behind the Coptic Christian community and their right to practice their faith in safety and security, free of persecution. This is a universal human right and one which our Government is committed to defending."<sup>34</sup> The security and welfare of Coptic communities resonates with Canadians on a domestic level. While estimates vary, Canada may have the largest Coptic diaspora after the United States, with a community of roughly 250,000.<sup>35</sup> Canadian political leaders have often vied for their support. In fact, while running for reelection in October 2011, Harper visited a Toronto-area Coptic community center to announce his plans to establish a major new bureau, the Office for Religious Freedoms, within the Department of Foreign Affairs.<sup>36</sup> The office, which is still being developed, will focus on advocating on the behalf of threatened international religious

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<sup>31</sup> *Globe and Mail*, "Israeli President set for Warm Reception from Mulcair," May 6, 2012; Andy Levy-Ajzenkopf, "New NDP Leaders Strongly Backs Israel," *Canadian Jewish News*, March 26, 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Harper, "Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on the attack on the Israeli Embassy in Cairo," Ottawa, Ontario, September 20, 2011, accessed December 2012, <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?category=3&id=4333>

<sup>33</sup> Zvi Bar'el, "Muslim Brotherhood: We will not put Egypt-Israel peace treaty to referendum," *Haaretz*, April 7, 2012; David Kirkpatrick, "Islamist Victors in Egypt Seeking Shift by Hamas," *New York Times*, March 24, 2012; David Kirkpatrick, "Egyptian Party Threatens to Review Treaty with Israel," *New York Times*, February 16, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Harper, "Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on the situation in Egypt," Ottawa, Ontario, May 9, 2011, accessed December 2012, <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?category=3&id=4101>

<sup>35</sup> *Canadian Press*, "Harper meets with Coptic Christian Priests," January 13, 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Steven Chase, "Harper pledges to create watchdog office for global religious freedom," *Globe and Mail*, October 4, 2011; Steven Chase, "Conservatives laying groundwork for Office of Religious Freedom," *Globe and Mail*, January 1, 2012;



minorities, opposing religious hatred abroad, and promoting “Canadian values of pluralism and tolerance.”<sup>37</sup> That hundreds of thousands of Copts have left Egypt since early 2011, and that roughly one-sixth of them have purportedly relocated to Canada, suggests the issue of religious intolerance will remain a sensitive issue in Canadian politics for some time.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, as the domestic debates concerning Sharia in Canada reveal, some worry about the fate of women under Islamist governance. As Patrick Martin, the Middle East correspondent for Canada’s leading national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, noted following Egypt’s preliminary presidential election in May 2012, “the Muslim Brotherhood seeks to repeal laws ... that broadened women’s rights (particularly their right to divorce) on the grounds that these laws were imposed under foreign pressure ... [and it] is keen to use the power of government to shape the morality of its citizens in matters of modesty, alcohol consumption and freedom of expression.”<sup>39</sup> For Canadians, the treatment of women, like the treatment of religious minorities, will remain a humanitarian concern. For the Canadian government, these concerns may well influence foreign policy.

It is worth reiterating: Canada’s support for the Libyan intervention at the height of the Arab Spring was largely based on humanitarian considerations, as is its evolving policy towards Syria. This suggests that the manner in which minority groups and women in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and elsewhere are treated under the incoming Islamist governments will partially determine Canada’s future foreign relations. Violence against Copts in Egypt, for instance, is widely attributed to Salafi thugs. That ultraconservative Salafi-oriented political parties (notably Hizb Al-Nour) now enjoy impressive clout in Egypt’s emerging political landscape might lead to the gradual institutionalization of intolerance.<sup>40</sup> The same may hold for the rights and freedom of women, too. For Canadians, the persecution of minorities—especially Jews, Bahi’a, and Christians living in Muslim-majority countries—along with the treatment of women, will resonate strongly. How strongly, and to what effect these positions will have on Canadian policy, will depend on the Islamists.

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<sup>37</sup> *Canadian Press*, “Religious freedom office defended by Baird,” January 2, 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Andre Aciman, “After Egypt’s Revolution, Christians are Living in Fear,” *New York Times*, November 19, 2011; Negar Azimi, “In Egypt, the Lure of Leaving,” *New York Times*, August 26, 2011; Lawrence Solomon, “Exodus from the Arab Spring,” *Globe and Mail*, October 14, 2011.

<sup>39</sup> Patrick Martin, “Will Egypt Finish the Islamist Arc—or be the First to Buck the Trend?” *Globe and Mail*, May 26, 2012. See also, Hamida Ghafour, “Was the Arab Spring a Step Backwards for Women?” *Globe and Mail*, April 13, 2012; *Agence France-Presse*, “Sharia Law Declaration Raises fears among Women in New Libya,” October 24, 2011; Mona Eltahawy, “Why Do They Hate Us?” *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2012.

<sup>40</sup> David Kirkpatrick, “In Egypt, No Alliance with Ultraconservatives, Islamist Party Says,” *New York Times*, December 1, 2011; Yasmine Saleh, “Copts to Shun Islamists in Egypt’s Presidential Vote,” *Reuters*, May 15, 2012.

# Political Islam According to the Dutch

By Roel Meijer

## Introduction

The Dutch attitude towards Islamist movements or “political Islam” is as much determined by internal developments in the Netherlands as those in the Middle East. It is not so much political Islam itself—of which people know little—but rather the process of secularization that has swept the Netherlands during the past half century. This accounts for the Dutch distrust of religion and its imposed restrictions and dogma. As a country that prides itself on its toleration and openness as a result of its secularization, it was surprised and angered to be confronted with a new religion within its borders when Muslim migrants came to the Netherlands. Instead of withering away, Islam was very much alive and challenged the values the Dutch stood for. As a result, Islam and especially “political Islam” became the great “Other.” By some it was considered in the same role as Christianity earlier, as the opposite of “enlightenment.”

## Background

Perhaps more than any country in Europe the Netherlands has secularized faster and to a far greater extent during the past fifty years.<sup>1</sup> Dutch who register themselves as being members of a church have become a minority. This is a spectacular development, for the Netherlands were in the forefront of the Reformation in the sixteenth century and although Amsterdam was a tolerant city due to its position as the European center of trade in the seventeenth century, the Dutch were known for their strict Calvinism. Indeed, the Netherlands today has a “bible-belt” that runs diagonally across the country from the IJsselmeer, in the middle of the country, to the Zeeland, in the southwest. In the pre-modern period, strict Calvinism was very important and played a tremendous role in society and especially politics. Half of the population belonged to the Reformed Protestant church, or were members of one of the dozen or so strict Protestant sects.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Anti-Revolutionary Party was established as a bulwark against the unholy principles of the French Revolution and liberalism. During the same period the Roman Catholic Church, representing the other half of the population, also experienced a period of rapid growth and self-confidence. Until the 1960s, Christian political parties constituted the majority in parliament. Together with the Socialist parties, they represented the dominant forces in the so-called “pillar-system” in which all three groups formed segmented communities, where their leaders made the deals at the highest level but whose members lived separately from each other, went to different schools, football clubs, etc. In some ways this system was comparable to the millet system

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent overview of the Dutch attitude towards religion, see Sipco Vellenga, “Religieuze orthodoxie als Bedreiging,” [Religious Orthodoxy as Threat], in *Religie en Veiligheid*, Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid, no. 2, vol. 2 (2011), pp. 7-22.

in the Ottoman Empire, or later in Lebanon, where the *zu'ama* negotiated at the highest level. The major difference was that the communities in the Netherlands no longer went at each other's throat after the Thirty Years Wars (1618-1648) when religious wars had ended.

The dominance of religion changed after World War II when society rapidly secularized, the influence of the churches on its members dwindled and Christian political parties lost their fixed support base. Instead, a strong anti-clerical and anti-religious sentiment arose which condemned religiosity as backward and tried to ban all forms of religiosity in public. The political system, however, did not change. The Netherlands did not adopt a French strict separation of "church and state," as in the system of *laïcité*. For instance, the Dutch still have religiously based schools paid by tax money. The anachronism was allowed to persist, until voices were raised against it because it also allowed for Islamic schools to be established.

The rapid de-Christianization of society worked to the disadvantage of the Muslim migrant workers who came to the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s, at the peak of this process. When migrant families united in the 1970s and 1980s, enhancing Islamic/traditional family values, and it became apparent that migrants were there to stay, the Dutch realized that a new community had arrived that would not easily blend into society. Belatedly, society realized that a large group of mainly Moroccans and Turks (300,000 in the 1980s, now 800,000) lived in Holland, who did not speak the language, did not recognize its customs, and had no intention of becoming Dutch. By that time already a new generation was growing up that was regarded as "lost."

But as the 1980s and 1990s were dominated by the emergence of the Right, and the Left was accused of having "pampered" the mainly Muslim migrants, the political debate concentrated not on their lack of economic opportunities and improving the education of their children, but on integration and assimilation and the obstacles to that process. The Right argued that Islam was the main culprit in keeping Muslims from becoming Dutch. Instead of watering down their identity and allowing religion to become a private matter, Islam acted as a bulwark that kept them "imprisoned" in "outdated" beliefs and attitudes. In this sense, the critique of Christianity and the "obscurantism" of the church was re-focused and latched itself on Islam and its promotion of "medieval" values and rejection of "modernity." This was especially the case regarding the position of women.

The general belief—of especially left and non-church/secular left and liberal Dutch—was that Holland had done itself a great disservice by importing not only the Third World, but also its most backward part. If the Dutch had previously thought that their emancipation from the established church and religious doctrine was completed, it seemed that society had to start all over again by educating the newcomers on the benefits of the Enlightenment. Apart from the position of women the other test case was homosexuality. Tolerance, women's liberation and acceptance of homosexuality were regarded as the hallmarks of Dutch progressiveness. But in the eyes of the most Muslims, these ideas were blasphemous. Not they but the Dutch were uncivilized. To defend themselves, they stressed their own Islamic identity and its qualities in opposition to the Dutch. It is no accident that Muslim migrants were often defended by strict Protestants, who also felt threatened

by the new secularized, arrogant elite, the so-called “canal-ring elite” (“Grachtengordel,” because they were assumed to live in the heart of Amsterdam) and their attack on conservative family values.

Another reason why Islam became the focus of attack was the rise of the Right and populist groups which expressed a public critique of the so-called “multi-cultural society,” which had allowed Muslims to keep their own identity and neglected their integration. The attack was launched at the beginning of the 1990s by liberal politician Fritz Bolkestein, but was carried on in 2000 by left-wing journalist Paul Scheffer in his notorious article “The multi-cultural drama.”<sup>2</sup> The torch was picked up by the populist right-wing homosexual politician Pim Fortuyn, who was assassinated in 2002, and popularized the term “islamization of Dutch society.”<sup>3</sup> It was finally carried to its extreme by the journalist and filmmaker Theo van Gogh. Stretching the freedom of speech to its limits, he called Muslims “goat-fuckers.” The lowest point in this brief history of agitation against Islam is represented by Geert Wilders and his crusade against Islam.

How does political Islam fit into this debate? The Muslim Brotherhood had never put down roots worth mentioning in the Netherlands,<sup>4</sup> as was the case in France,<sup>5</sup> because students from the Middle East did not go to this country to study as they were unfamiliar with the language. Salafism, which operated through mosques and was much less intellectually inclined, did appeal to Moroccan youth in the Netherlands because it presented an alternative world view that rejected discrimination and offered “the total truth,” which the Brotherhood did not.<sup>6</sup> Salafism only became overtly political after 9/11 when jihadi Salafism turned into the ultimate provocation in a society that abhorred religion, let alone the idea that one would sacrifice his life for it.<sup>7</sup>

As a result it took a long time before political Islam was debated. Traditionally, many Dutch regarded Islam as worse than Christianity because it does not accept the division between church and state. The sharia, which supposedly supports an Islamic state, is seen as the main threat. But not until the second wave of Islamic activism in the 1970s and 1980s in the Middle East that political Islam came into view. Rising at the same time that religion, let alone politicized religion, was

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<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the debate in the 1990s, see, Baukje Prins, *Past Innocence: The Debate on Integration in the Netherlands*, (Amsterdam: Van Genneep, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> For his (superficial) views on Islam, see Pim Fortuyn, *The Islamization of Our Culture: Dutch Identity as Basis* (Rotterdam: Karakter Uitgevers, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Edwin Bakker, “The Public Image of the Muslim Brothers in the Netherlands,” *The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, Roel Meijer & Edwin Bakker (London: Hurst & Co, 2012) p. 167-86.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Frank, “Muslim ‘Double Talk’ and the Ways of the Shari‘a in France,” *The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, Roel Meijer & Edwin Bakker (London: Hurst & Co, 2012), pp. 123-44.

<sup>6</sup> The best article in this respect is Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, “Salafism in France: Ideology, Practice and Contradictions,” in Roel Meijer (ed.) *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement* (London: Hurst & Co. 2009), pp. 364-83.

<sup>7</sup> For more on Jihadi Salafism and the so-called Hofstad group, see Martijn de Koning, *In Search of the ‘Pure’ Islam: Belief and Identity Formation of Young Moroccan-Dutch Muslims*(Amsterdam, Boom, 2008); Martijn de Koning and Roel Meijer, “‘Going all the Way’: Politicization and Radicalization of the Hofstad Network in the Netherlands,” in A.E. Azzi, X. Chrysoschoou, B. Klandermans & B. Simon (eds.), *Identity and Participation in Culturally Diverse Societies: A Multidisciplinary Approach*(Oxford: 2011), pp. 220-239.

declining in the Netherlands and Europe, it seemed to confirm the idea that political Islam was backward looking, anti-modern and wanted to install a caliphate and return to the Middle Ages. It was analyzed in the same terms as Christianity: it was “fundamentalist,” “extremist,” “radical,” and “ultra-orthodox.” However, little effort was made to determine what these terms meant in a Muslim context, let alone in a completely different cultural, social and political context of the Middle East. Moreover, Islam, and to the more sophisticated, political Islam, became associated with violence in a crescendo of attacks and mayhem over the next decades: the Iranian revolution in 1979, the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981, the Algerian civil war in 1991-1997, the bloodbath among tourists at Luxor in 1997, and, of course, 9/11, followed by the carnage of missions in Iraq. All of this was somehow always connected to political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood. That the Brotherhood might evolve was hardly considered.

The murder of Theo van Gogh on November 2, 2004 by the young Moroccan-Dutch Mohammed Bouyeri seemed the logical outcome of the disastrous role Islam and political Islam played in the world.<sup>8</sup> Few were willing to analyze it as both the ultimate failure to come to grips with the migrants and their problems in the Netherlands, but also as the failure to analyze Islam and especially political Islam. By agitating against Islam per se the Dutch had created a monster they were unable to tackle because they did not have the tools to analyze it. Although in the aftermath of van Gogh’s death, attempts were made to make distinctions between political and non-political Islam, al Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood, and the attraction of Salafism to young Moroccan-Dutch. Yet populist politicians, like Geert Wilders, had based their political careers on the condemnation of Islam. Ultimately, attempts to bring sanity into this debate were lost in the fray.

Yet, since 2005, four attitudes towards Islam and political Islam can be identified in the Netherlands. On one extreme, stands the political party of Geert Wilders of the PVV (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*), which does not make a distinction between Islam and political Islam. His party program expresses this sentiment that “Islam is primarily a political ideology; a totalitarian doctrine that is geared to [acquiring] supremacy, violence and repression”.<sup>9</sup> He is supported by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who has become internationally notorious for attacking the prophet Mohammed and confusing traditional practices as genital mutilation with Islam. This group is provided with the “scientific” ammunition by the Orientalist Hans Jansen, who has written several books condemning Islam as a violent and fundamentally anti-democratic religion.<sup>10</sup> The second group consists of people who are more careful, making an important distinction between Islam as a religion and political Islam. The Iranian refugee Afshin Ellian, who condemns political Islam as “green fascism,” belongs to this group.<sup>11</sup> The third,

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<sup>8</sup> The best book on this bleak period in Dutch history written in English, Ian Buruma’s brilliant, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo Van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> PVV, Election programme. *The Agenda of Hope and Optimism: Time to Decide*, PVV 2010-2015 (The Hague, 2010), p. 13

<sup>10</sup> Hans Jansen’s latest book, which caused an uproar, is called *Islam for Pigs, Monkeys, Donkeys and Other Animals* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij van Praag, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> For a collection of the articles Afshin Ellian has written for NRC Handelsblad, see his book, *Letters of a Persian: On Dutch and Islamic Cannibalism* (Amsterdam: Meulenhof, 2005).

rather grey, group is highly suspicious of political Islam and considers it dangerous and radical but regards Islam as a religion on which they have little to comment. To this group belong most journalists but also the Dutch intelligence service, the AIVD (*Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst*) and Christian Democrats. The fourth, very small group consists of specialists who are more nuanced and recognize that organizations like the Brotherhood have evolved over the past 30 years, have become more pragmatic, and no longer strive for an Islamic state. This group argues that the Brotherhood does not pose a threat to Europe.<sup>12</sup> It believes it should be recognized and allowed a chance to acquire power in the Middle East if it is voted into power by the ballot box.<sup>13</sup> Once the movement is in power it will have to make compromises and water down its ideological spin.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Image of the Muslim Brotherhood**

The third group deserves the most attention here, as it represents the middle of the road in the Netherlands and has the greatest influence on public opinion.<sup>15</sup>

The intelligence reports of the AIVD written in the wake of 9/11 on political Islam and jihadism are instructive in this regard.<sup>16</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood is mentioned in the December 2002 publication entitled *Recruitment for the Jihad in the Netherlands from Incident to Trend*, noting that in the Netherlands the Muslim Brotherhood's set of ideas was losing ground to Salafism.<sup>17</sup> Two years later, in December 2004, the publication *From Dawa to Jihad: The Various Threats from Radical Islam to the Democratic Legal Order* refers to the Muslim Brotherhood only twice. In an update to this report, published in October 2007, the AIVD for the first time presents a more original analysis of the Muslim Brotherhood, calling it "a radical *da'wa* movement."<sup>18</sup> It pointed out that "the Muslim Brotherhood certainly has some support in the Netherlands," referring to the Essalaam mosque in Rotterdam.<sup>19</sup> It underwrites two anti-Brotherhood tropes that have become wide-spread: one is that the Muslim Brotherhood is the founding father of today's radical Muslim activism,<sup>20</sup> and the other is that it is a duplicitous organization: it warns that Muslim Brothers or their sympathisers "are not recognisable as such" and that they "do not always reveal their religious loyalties and ultra-orthodox

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<sup>12</sup> For an overview of the debate in Europe, see my introduction to *The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, Roel Meijer & Edwin Bakker (London: Hurst & Co, 2012), pp. 1-23.

<sup>13</sup> Bertus Hendriks and Roel Meijer, "Utopische Broeders zijn realisten geworden," *de Volkskrant*, February 18, 2011, <http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/?id=8327>

<sup>14</sup> Roel Meijer, *Towards a Political Islam* (Clingendael Diplomatic Papers Series, No. 22, 2009), p. 1-55.

<sup>15</sup> The best books on the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, is Lorenzo Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) and Brigitte Maréchal, *The Muslim Brothers in Europe: Roots and Discourse* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> For this section on the AIVD reports, I have relied on Edwin Bakker, "The Public Image of the Muslim Brothers in the Netherlands," *The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, Roel Meijer & Edwin Bakker (London: Hurst & Co, 2012), pp. 167-86.

<sup>17</sup> AIVD, *Rekrutering in Nederland voor de jihad, van incident tot trend*, The Hague, 2002, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> AIVD, *The Radical Dawa in Transition: The Rise of Islamic Neo-Radicalism in the Netherlands*, The Hague, 2007, pp. 12, and. 48.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

agenda to outsiders.”<sup>21</sup> In France, where these notions probably derive from, this became known as the “*le double langage*.” The Brotherhood is also considered “radical” because it actively wants to force society to reform along strict Islamic lines and rejects the Western democratic legal order.<sup>22</sup> The next public document of the AIVD that speaks more extensively of the Muslim Brotherhood presence in the Netherlands is its annual report of 2009. This report describes the Brotherhood as a political-Islamic movement that “seeks to re-Islamize Muslims in Europe according to their (ultra-)orthodox ideology.” The AIVD warns that the orthodox interpretation of Islam by the Muslim Brotherhood could be opposed to democratic rule of law.<sup>23</sup>

The opinions on the Brotherhood represented in these reports are significantly less nuanced in the pages of the Dutch right-wing daily newspaper *De Telegraaf* and the weekly *Elsevier*. The Brotherhood is always brought up in relation to connections with terrorism and terrorist attacks against Israel. But it is not only linked to Hamas, but also to the Gama’at al-Islamiyya and even the Hofstad group, the group to which Bouyeri belonged.<sup>24</sup> *De Telegraaf* consistently calls the movement the “notorious Brotherhood.” As in many other European countries, its *bête noire* is the Qatari based preacher Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who the newspaper warns has been photographed in the presence of members of Hamas and Hizbollah.<sup>25</sup> Not surprisingly, *De Telegraaf* supported Nicholas Sarkozy when he refused al-Qaradawi an entrance visa for France in April 2012.<sup>26</sup>

In the Netherlands, *De Telegraaf* believed it had finally discovered its mole Brotherhood member when it turned on the Moroccan-Dutch politician Yahyia Bouyafa, who supposedly ran the Muslim Contact Group as part of the international network of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>27</sup> It quoted the above mentioned 2009 AIVD report on the Brotherhood’s attempts to “re-Islamize Europe.”<sup>28</sup> Yahyia Bouyafa was believed to be secretly promoting the establishment of an “ultra-orthodox pillar in Europe.”<sup>29</sup> *Elsevier* titled the article on the issue, “Dutch mosques under control of Muslim

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 51.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> AIVD, Annual Report 2009, The Hague, 2010, p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> “Cohen: Brotherhood not Dangerous,” *Elsevier*, April 12, 2012,

<http://www.elsevier.nl/web/10119493/Nieuws/Politiek/Cohen-Moslim-Broederschap-niet-gevaarlijk.htm>

<sup>25</sup> Rolf Bos, “Shaykh is Sheep in Wolves’ Clothes,” *de Volkskrant*, February 21, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1836788/2011/02/21/Sjeik-is-een-wolf-in-schaapskleren.dhtml>

<sup>26</sup> “Sarkozy Bans Refuses Preachers,” *De Telegraaf*, March 26, 2012,

[http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/11787858/\\_\\_\\_Sarkozy\\_wil\\_haatimams\\_weren\\_.html](http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/11787858/___Sarkozy_wil_haatimams_weren_.html)

<sup>27</sup> “Counter-part of Minister Vogelaar is Member of the Muslim Brotherhood,” *De Telegraaf*, November 28, 2007,

[http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/2633016/\\_Gesprekspartner\\_Vogelaar\\_bij\\_Moslim\\_Broederschap\\_.html](http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/2633016/_Gesprekspartner_Vogelaar_bij_Moslim_Broederschap_.html)

<sup>28</sup> “Amsterdam Breeding Ground of Notorious Muslim Brotherhood,” *De Telegraaf*, April 21, 2010,

[http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/6567340/\\_\\_\\_A\\_dam\\_broed-plaats\\_Moslimbroeders\\_.html](http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/6567340/___A_dam_broed-plaats_Moslimbroeders_.html)

<sup>29</sup> “Bouyafa Member of the Muslim Brotherhood,” *De Telegraaf*, December 21, 2011,

[http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/5614781/\\_\\_\\_Bouyafa\\_lid\\_Moslimbroederschap\\_.html](http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/5614781/___Bouyafa_lid_Moslimbroederschap_.html)

Extremists,” calling the Brotherhood “a world-wide movement that has produced several terror organizations.”<sup>30</sup>

But the antipathy against political Islam is not just a Right-wing impulse; the Left-wing newspaper *de Volkskrant* is also not enthusiastic about the Brotherhood. It supported the trope that the Brotherhood offers a complete system for every aspect of life and therefore is against integration in Western societies and is out to establish a “parallel society.”<sup>31</sup> Some journalists even described the Brotherhood as an organization that pursues establishing a “pure Islamic state,” without giving any explanation what they mean by it.<sup>32</sup> More concretely, fear was related to the influence of foreign organizations on Dutch Muslims based on the assumption that “who pays determines” (*wie betaalt bepaalt*). Like *De Telegraaf*, *de Volkskrant* believed the Brotherhood had infiltrated the council of the Essalam mosque in The Hague and the Wester mosque in Amsterdam.<sup>33</sup> Taking up the call to do something against “political Islam,” parliament demanded further research into the matter in the fall of 2007.<sup>34</sup> At one point the minister of Integration was criticized for maintaining contact with the Contact Group Islam, whose chairman supposedly was “a spider in the web of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood.”<sup>35</sup> The mayor of Amsterdam at the time, Job Cohen, was also criticized for downplaying the threat of these connections.<sup>36</sup> Typically, the extreme right wing PVV of Geert Wilders was the first to ask a question in parliament on the issue.<sup>37</sup>

Earlier, the extreme sensitivity of “political Islam” was revealed in the uproar over the publication of the report of the Scientific Council for Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het

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<sup>30</sup> “Dutch mosques under control of Muslim Extremists,” *Elsevier*, March 24, 2007, <http://www.elsevier.nl/web/10117158/Nieuws/Nederland/Nederlandse-moskeen-in-greep-van-extremisten.htm>

<sup>31</sup> Martin Janssen, “Protect Muslims against Islam as Ideology,” *de Volkskrant*, October 5, 2010, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/2448495/2010/10/05/Bescherm-moslims-tegen-islam-als-ideologie.dhtml>

<sup>32</sup> Henk Müller, “Escape Creates Gaping Hole for Israel,” *de Volkskrant*, January 24, 2008, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/883959/2008/01/24/Uitbraak-creert-gapend-gat-voor-Israel.dhtml>

<sup>33</sup> “CDA [Christian Democratic Party] is concerned about Foreign Influence on Mosques,” *de Volkskrant*, March 24, 2007, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/836833/2007/03/24/CDA-verontrust-over-slechte-invloeden-op-moskeen.dhtml>

<sup>34</sup> “Parliament: Research Foreign Influence on Mosques,” *de Volkskrant*, November 27, 2007, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/866333/2007/11/27/Kamer-Onderzoek-buitenlandse-invloed-op-moskeen.dhtml>

<sup>35</sup> “PVV want more information on the Contact Group Islam,” *de Volkskrant*, August 4, 2007, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/871038/2007/08/04/PVV-wil-opheldering-over-Contact-Groep-Islam.dhtml>

<sup>36</sup> “Cohen: Brotherhood not Dangerous,” *Elsevier*, April 12, 2012, <http://www.elsevier.nl/web/10119493/Nieuws/Politiek/Cohen-Moslim-Broederschap-niet-gevaarlijk.htm>

<sup>37</sup> “PVV want more information on the Contact Group Islam,” *de Volkskrant*, August 4, 2007, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/871038/2007/08/04/PVV-wil-opheldering-over-Contact-Groep-Islam.dhtml>



Regeringsbeleid, WRR), *Dynamics of Islamic Activism*, when it was presented to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ben Bot on April 12, 2006. It confronted the main anti-political Islam tropes in the public opinion head-on, denying that Islam was incompatible with democracy. It recognized that there were many liberal Islamic thinkers and that the Muslim Brotherhood had changed and become more democratic.<sup>38</sup> It accused Right-wing politicians of “irresponsible rabble-rousing against Islam.” The minister immediately distanced himself from its important recommendation to enter dialogue with what the *de Volkskrant* called “radical (terrorist) organizations,” such as Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizbollah. Its recommendation to stimulate the founding of an “Islamic inspired” political party in the Netherlands likewise drew criticism.<sup>39</sup> In a more thorough analysis of the important report, even *de Volkskrant* believed the report assigned too much credence to liberal currents in Islam, which, it stated, are marginal. The problem with movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, *de Volkskrant* argued, is that they are both political and religious movements. As the former they are pragmatic and flexible, but as the latter they are dogmatic and conservative. As a result they remain vague and are difficult to characterize.<sup>40</sup> The WRR report however was supported by Nasr Abu Zayd, who was living in exile in the Netherlands and was himself the victim of a *hisba* case in Egypt. Arguably more aware of what was happening in the Islamic world than *de Volkskrant*, he believed that dialogue with the Islamists should be stimulated.<sup>41</sup> In an interview with the *de Volkskrant*, Alistair Crooke was also sympathetic to the idea of contacts with Islamist movements like Hamas, as their shunning would produce the opposite attitude that the West was trying to cultivate in the region.<sup>42</sup>

The political response to the report was divided, as was the attitude towards political Islam. The liberal-right wing VVD was divided between those politicians who supported the WRR report, such as Hans Wiegel and its then leader Hans Dijkstal. They rejected the suggestion by their fellow VVD party member Ayaan Hirsi Ali to close Islamic schools. The Christian Democrats were also divided

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<sup>38</sup> “Positive Attitude is Advocated by Council,” *de Volkskrant*, April 12, 2006, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/765986/2006/04/12/Positieve-bejegening-van-islam-bepleit-door-raad.dhtml>

<sup>39</sup> “Unbalanced Report,” *de Volkskrant*, April 13, 2006, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2824/Politiek/archief/article/detail/788803/2006/04/13/Onevenwichtig-rapport.dhtml>

<sup>40</sup> Henk Müller, “Wishful Thinking in WRR,” *de Volkskrant*, April 13, 2006, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2824/Politiek/archief/article/detail/789142/2006/04/13/Wens-vader-van-de-gedachte-bij-WRR.dhtml>

<sup>41</sup> “The West Does not Notice the Process of Reform in Islam,” *de Volkskrant*, April 13, 2006, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2824/Politiek/archief/article/detail/789146/2006/04/13/Het-Westen-ziet-proces-van-hervorming-in-islam-niet.dhtml>

<sup>42</sup> “The West Must Open Dialogue with Islamists,” *de Volkskrant*, March 22, 2006, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/767588/2006/03/22/Westen-moet-in-gesprek-met-islamisten.dhtml>

between Ministers Van Ardenne and Donner on the one hand and Verhagen, who is much more critical and would later even form a coalition with the PVV, on the other.<sup>43</sup>

Another issue related to “political Islam” that attracted attention was Tariq Ramadan’s sojourn in the Netherlands. Although Tariq Ramadan is not a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, his stay was another occasion on which everyone could share their view of political Islam. Ramadan’s opponents were influenced by the French book *Frère Tariq* by Caroline Fourès.<sup>44</sup> Tariq Ramadan was constantly portrayed as connected to the “radical Muslim Brotherhood” founded by his grandfather, who took advantage of the “weakness of our democratic system” in Europe; “the moderate Islam as a Trojan horse.” Those naïve Dutch, unaware of the Brotherhood’s dangers, were gullible enough to bring it inside the castle. Like the Brotherhood Tariq Ramadan speaks sweetly but in the end he will introduce the *sharia*.<sup>45</sup> [

By the end of the decade, however, the general atmosphere toward Islam, and in some ways, political Islam, greatly improved. Most Dutch realized that the brush with “radical Islam” in the Netherlands had been quite mild. In contrast to the United States, Great Britain and Spain, where thousands had died, only one, extremely provocative individual, who had brought out the worst in an unstable person such as Mohamed Bouyeri, had died. By 2009 *de Volkskrant* dropped the sobriquet “fundamentalist” when referring to the Brotherhood.<sup>46</sup> Neither were claims that the Brotherhood was out to obtain “world supremacy” taken that seriously anymore.<sup>47</sup> Even *De Telegraaf* had toned down, quoting different experts who believed that the radical phase had ended, although they warned that we had to remain vigilant for possible homegrown radicalism.<sup>48</sup> With the increasing economic crisis, most people had also become fed-up with the anti-Islam rhetoric of Geert Wilders,

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<sup>43</sup> “WRR touches open wound with Islam Report,” *de Volkskrant*, April 12, 2006, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/765987/2006/04/12/WRR-raakt-open-zenuw-met-islam-rapport.dhtml>

<sup>44</sup> “Sixteen Years Controversial,” *de Volkskrant*, August 22, 2009, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2664/Nieuws/archief/article/detail/352809/2009/08/22/Al-zestien-jaar-controversieel.dhtml>

<sup>45</sup> Johan Piter Verwey, “Don’t Become a Dhimmi of [Tariq] Ramadan,” *de Volkskrant*, September 9, 2009, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/2454408/2009/09/02/Wordt-geen-dhimmi-van-Ramadan.dhtml>

<sup>46</sup> As far as I have been able to trace, the last article written by a *de Volkskrant* journalist referring to the “fundamentalistic Muslim Brotherhood” was Ferry Biederman in his article, “There is No Difference Between What Obama Says and What Bush Said,” *de Volkskrant*, June 6, 2009, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/archief/article/detail/340422/2009/06/06/Er-is-geen-verschil-tussen-wat-Bush-zei-en-wat-Obama-zegt.dhtml>

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Jonathan Schanzer, “Jonathan Schanzer— Fatah vs. Hamas. The Struggle for Palestine,” *de Volkskrant*, March 20, 2009, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2664/Nieuws/article/detail/322460/2009/03/20/Jonathan-Schanzer---Fatah-vs-Hamas-The-Struggle-for-Palestine.dhtml>

<sup>48</sup> “Vigilance is Still Required,” *De Telegraaf*, May 21, 2011, [http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/9848107/\\_Alert\\_blijven\\_na\\_dood\\_Osama\\_.html](http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/9848107/_Alert_blijven_na_dood_Osama_.html)

something he seemed to realize himself when he highlighted the EU as a main threat to Dutch national identity.

## The Arab Spring

### *Tahrir*

The Arab Spring broadened the Dutch vision, showing that people in the Middle East were not Muslims caught up in some permanent struggle to return to the Middle Ages and establish the caliphate. They appeared to be rational, their demands were by all standards reasonable and the Dutch public could easily relate to them. Certainly the tremendous courage of demonstrators on Tahrir Square was admired. People remained glued to their TV sets not to miss the ongoing story. They identified with the demonstrators on Tahrir, who were perceived to uphold the same ideals, “freedom and liberty,” respect for “individual dignity” and “civil rights,” “as we enjoy them in the West.” These ideals supposedly had an “irresistible attraction” and proved to be “universal values.”<sup>49</sup> Sometimes their story was analyzed in the usual stereotypes: Egyptians had, for instance, shrugged off thousands of years of submission to pharaohs. Even a suicide, like that of Mohamed Bouzazizi, often regarded as a sacrifice for a political goal, was applauded. It seemed as if the Middle East, that black hole of misery, had rejoined history; as if the Mediterranean, formerly regarded as healthy barrier to barbarism on the other side of the shore, had shrunk and people could shake hands across its waters. Although much of this was euro-centric and the assumption was that Europe was superior, the positive side was that Arabs were perceived as humans and not just Muslims.

### Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda

The response of newspapers overall was also positive. Newspapers like *de Volkskrant* were aware of the complexity of the political situation. They rejected the idea that Islam and democracy were incompatible and that there is only room for authoritarian regimes in the Middle East.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, many newspapers underscored the tremendous obstacle in lacking existing institutions.<sup>51</sup>

Political parties were divided. Neglecting the fact that Muslims had arisen against the dictators, the right wing PVV of Wilders immediately warned that the Brotherhood would take advantage of the situation and revoke the peace treaty with Israel.<sup>52</sup> Also the prime minister’s first reaction was to

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<sup>49</sup> “Hope for Freedom and nostalgia for the Caliphate,” *de Volkskrant*, February 5, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1831689/2011/02/05/Hoop-op-vrijheid-en-heimwee-naar-kalifaat.dhtml>

<sup>50</sup> Pieter Hillhorst, “The Arabic Spring,” *de Volkskrant*, February 2, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/6214/Pieter-Hilhorst/article/detail/2448074/2011/02/01/Arabische-lente.dhtml>

<sup>51</sup> “Why Now?” *de Volkskrant*, February 5, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1831718/2011/02/05/Maar-waarom-pas-nu.dhtml>

<sup>52</sup> “Parliament: EU Reacts too Weak to Egypt,” *De Telegraaf*, February 3, 2012, [http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/8921109/\\_\\_\\_Kamer\\_\\_\\_slappe\\_reactie\\_EU\\_op\\_Egypte\\_.html](http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/8921109/___Kamer___slappe_reactie_EU_op_Egypte_.html)

warn against the Brotherhood's rise. However, the left's response was more balanced. The Green Party (GroenLinks) MP Mariko Peters, after a trip to Egypt, warned right-wing politicians that it was "far too early to judge the Brotherhood." An assessment was only possible as it started to take part in the political process after the elections, he reasoned.<sup>53</sup>

Over all, the Muslim Brotherhood's image in the media had improved considerably. *De Volkskrant* regarded the Brotherhood as "moderate," although "ambivalent."<sup>54</sup> The newspaper has covered most of the events marking of the Muslim Brotherhood during the past one and half years, such as its intention to establish a political party,<sup>55</sup> and its support of the March 19<sup>th</sup> referendum. The paper noted that the chances for winning the elections were good, for the Brotherhood is "the best organized political force in Egypt,"<sup>56</sup> and the actual foundation of the political party.<sup>57</sup> It mentioned that 50,000 Muslim Brotherhood members had participated in the Tahrir demonstrations on November 19, against the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and the principles of the constitution that would give the military privileges and restrict parliamentary overview. It noticed the election of Mohammed Sa'd al-Katatni as speaker of parliament.<sup>58</sup> It published only a small notification when the MB presented a candidate for the presidency.<sup>59</sup> What appeals to the *de Volkskrant* is that the Brotherhood stands up to SCAF and speaks in the name of the "people" against the authority of the military.<sup>60</sup> When the election results became known, it wrote that the Brotherhood has "softened its tone" and became "moderate" and "pragmatic" and that its program has been increasingly directed toward social justice and equality rather than establishing an Islamic state. Whenever it raises doubts about the Brotherhood's "intentions," it quotes critics and

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<sup>53</sup> "Critic of the Muslim Brotherhood Is too Early," [www.nu.nl](http://www.nu.nl/egypte/2519783/kritiek-moslimbroederschap-komt-veel-vroeg.html), May 23, 2011, <http://www.nu.nl/egypte/2519783/kritiek-moslimbroederschap-komt-veel-vroeg.html>

<sup>54</sup> *De Volkskrant*, May 12, 2012, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3261044/2012/05/25/Eindrace-Egypte-tussen-Moslimbroeders-en-Mubarak-kloon-Shafiq.dhtml>

<sup>55</sup> *De Volkskrant*, February 15, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/1834981/2011/02/15/Moslimbroeders-richten-politieke-partij-op.dhtml>

<sup>56</sup> *De Volkskrant*, March 20, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/1862686/2011/03/20/Egypte-stemt-in-met-grondwetswijzigingen.dhtml>

<sup>57</sup> *De Volkskrant*, April 30, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/1882942/2011/04/30/Egypte-Moslimbroederschap-richt-politieke-partij-op-mogelijk-doodstraf-Mubarak.dhtml>

<sup>58</sup> *De Volkskrant*, January 23, 2012, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3134664/2012/01/23/Islamist-als-parlementsvoorzitter-Egypte-aangesteld.dhtml>

<sup>59</sup> *De Volkskrant*, March 31, 2012, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3234239/2012/03/31/Toch-presidentskandidaat-Moslim-Broederschap.dhtml>

<sup>60</sup> *De Volkskrant*, December 1, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3059943/2011/12/01/Moslim-Broederschap-wil-in-Egypte-nieuwe-regering-vormen.dhtml>

opponents who “still regard the Brotherhood as a wolf in sheep’s clothes.”<sup>61</sup> The Brotherhood’s ambivalent character is expressed in its desire for freedom and a “nostalgia” (*heimwee*) for the caliphate and an Islamic “utopia” (*heilstaat*).<sup>62</sup>

Much the same goes for Ennahda, the Tunisian equivalent, which is also called moderate. But here, again, suspicions are evident. *De Volkskrant* even has translated the French “*le double langage*” into an awkward Dutch (“*dubbele taal*”), fearing that the position of women will be undermined gradually over the years.<sup>63</sup>

On the other hand, *de Volkskrant* does make some good points. It points out that the Muslim Brotherhood embraces democracy but that if democracy is introduced in an environment that does not have a rule of law “minorities will be crushed by majorities.”<sup>64</sup> It also is aware that the Brotherhood contains contradictions. It noticed, for instance, that it supported ElBaradei during the uprising in January-February.<sup>65</sup> In short, it seems to accept that the Brotherhood’s “duplicity” derives more from its political than its religious character.

The Dutch “quality newspaper,” the *NRC Handelsblad*, offers essentially the same view of the Muslim Brotherhood as *de Volkskrant*. There is only one difference. Its main journalist, who is a specialist in the Middle East, always adds the sobriquet “fundamentalist” when she mentions the Brotherhood.<sup>66</sup> Even the Tunisian Ennahda party is called “Muslim fundamentalist.”<sup>67</sup> *NRC Handelsblad* follows the Brotherhood very closely and has toned down its anti-Brotherhood terminology during the past year and a half. It also recognizes that the movement has become more moderate and that the party will be preoccupied with socio-economic problems rather than with

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<sup>61</sup> *De Volkskrant*, December 15, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/3064179/2011/12/05/Islamitisch-blok-in-Egypte-nog-lang-niet-zeker.dhtml>

<sup>62</sup> “Hope for Freedom and nostalgia for the Caliphate,” *de Volkskrant*, February 5, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1831689/2011/02/05/Hoop-op-vrijheid-en-heimwee-naar-kalifaat.dhtml>

<sup>63</sup> *De Volkskrant*, October 25, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/2988400/2011/10/25/Ondanks-vrije-en-open-verkiezingen-vrees-voor-uitslag-Tunesie.dhtml>

<sup>64</sup> “Hope for Freedom and nostalgia for the Caliphate,” *de Volkskrant*, February 1, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1831689/2011/02/05/Hoop-op-vrijheid-en-heimwee-naar-kalifaat.dhtml>

<sup>65</sup> Pieter Hillhorst, “The Arabic Spring,” *de Volkskrant*, February 2, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/6214/Pieter-Hilhorst/article/detail/2448074/2011/02/01/Arabische-lente.dhtml>

<sup>66</sup> “Brotherhood Wants a Coalition with Candidates to ‘Save’ the Revolution,” *NRC Handelsblad*, May 26, 2012, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/05/26/moslimbroeders-willen-verbond-met-kandidaten-om-revolutie-te-redden/>

<sup>67</sup> “Tunisian Fundamentalists: Another Revolution when Elections are Fraudulent,” *NRC Handelsblad*, October 19, 2011, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/10/19/tunesische-fundamentalisten-nieuwe-revolutie-bij-verkiezingsfraude/>

ideology.<sup>68</sup> Like *de Volkskrant*, it always offers warnings, for example, that “[Arab] progressives” are afraid that the organization at a certain point will pursue a “radical Islamic policy.”<sup>69</sup> *NRC Handelsblad* recognizes differences within the Muslim Brotherhood. The dissident, former Brotherhood leader Abd al-Mun‘aym Abu al-Futouh is regarded as a liberal who “intends to increase freedom” and is in favor of “social justice.” But even in his case, the newspaper refers to his past as founder of the Gama‘at al-Islamiyya which exercised “armed jihad” in the 1990s. The journalist forgets that the Gama‘at al-Islamiyya, at the time, was a highly diverse and decentralized student movement. Only a specific branch of the movement in Upper-Egypt that did not join the Brotherhood at the end of the 1970s accepted jihad. By that time Abd al-Mun‘aym had joined the Brotherhood.<sup>70</sup>

Oddly enough, the Right-wing newspaper *De Telegraaf* is one of the best informed Dutch newspapers on developments in Egypt and on the Brotherhood. It seldom adds the word “radical” to the Brotherhood. On some occasions it calls it “conservative-Islamist,” which is a great improvement compared to the other newspapers.<sup>71</sup> Abd al-Mun‘aym Abu al-Futouh is called “moderate.”<sup>72</sup> It covers the struggle between the Brotherhood and SCAF objectively, reporting on its participation in the Tahrir demonstrations against the military in July 2011.<sup>73</sup> It even frequently mentions moderate Brotherhood leaders as Mohammed al-Beltagi,<sup>74</sup> and major events such as the interference of the court in the Constituent Assembly.<sup>75</sup>

Although it is impossible to make a full overview of the different news sources in the Netherlands, websites which provide news about developments in the Middle East seem to follow the main

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<sup>68</sup> “Member Muslim Brother Chosen as Speaker of Parliament,” *NRC Handelsblad*, January 23, 2012, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/01/23/moslimbroeder-saad-al-katatni-verkozen-tot-voorzitter-parlement-egypte/>

<sup>69</sup> “The Brotherhood Has Come Up with Own Presidential Candidate After All,” *NRC-Handelsblad*, March 31, 2012, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/03/31/moslim-broederschap-komt-toch-met-kandidaat-voor-presidentsverkiezingen/>

<sup>70</sup> “Who Will Become the Next President of Egypt? The Four Hopefuls,” *NRC Handelsblad*, May 22, 2012, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/05/22/wie-wordt-de-nieuwe-president-van-egypte-de-vier-kanshebbers/>

<sup>71</sup> “Islamist Hope for New Success in Egypt,” *De Telegraaf*, December 14, 2011, [http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/11121399/\\_\\_Islamisten\\_hopen\\_op\\_succes\\_\\_.html](http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/11121399/__Islamisten_hopen_op_succes__.html)

<sup>72</sup> “Presidential Candidate Temporarily Halts his Campaign,” *De Telegraaf*, May 2, 2012, [http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/12046773/\\_\\_Kandidaat\\_Egypte\\_staakt\\_\\_.html](http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/12046773/__Kandidaat_Egypte_staakt__.html)

<sup>73</sup> “Brotherhood Supports Demonstrators,” *De Telegraaf*, July 6, 2012, [http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/10153524/\\_\\_Broederschap\\_achter\\_betogers\\_\\_.html](http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/10153524/__Broederschap_achter_betogers__.html)

<sup>74</sup> “Brotherhood Denies Taking Part in Presidential Elections,” *De Telegraaf*, February 4, 2011, [http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/8926330/\\_\\_Broederschap\\_geen\\_president\\_\\_.html](http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/8926330/__Broederschap_geen_president__.html)

<sup>75</sup> “Court Blocks Constituent Assembly,” *De Telegraaf*, April 10, 2012, [http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/11880747/\\_\\_Grondwet\\_Egypte\\_vertraagd\\_\\_.html](http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/11880747/__Grondwet_Egypte_vertraagd__.html)

newspapers' characterizations of the Brotherhood For instance, the news website [www.nu.nl](http://www.nu.nl) uses the more neutral terms “conservative” to describe the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>76</sup>

## Salafis

As with so many other sources in the West, for many commentators the rise and prominent position of Salafism came as a surprise. The demonstrations on Tahrir on July 29, in which the Salafis and Muslim Brotherhood dominated, were seen as a milestone event in the coverage of Salafism.<sup>77</sup>

In general it seems that Salafism has replaced the Muslim Brotherhood as the fundamentalists and the sobriquets used for the Brotherhood have been transferred to the Salafis. They have become the “ultra-orthodox,”<sup>78</sup> “guardians of the sharia,”<sup>79</sup> “puritans”<sup>80</sup> and “hardliners.”<sup>81</sup> In one case, they are regarded as “more radical” than the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>82</sup> Even *De Telegraaf* has begun to consider the Brotherhood moderate compared to the Salafist Nour Party which is viewed as “extreme Islamist.”<sup>83</sup> Even the traditionally far from nuanced news site [www.nu.nl](http://www.nu.nl) makes a difference between the “conservative” Muslim Brotherhood and the “fundamentalist” Nour Party.<sup>84</sup>

Sometimes, though, both the Brotherhood and the Salafis are called “fundamentalists,”<sup>85</sup> which is confusing. The NRC Handelsblad editor for the Middle East, Carolien Roelants, tries to define this term in one of her articles. She calls all Islamist movements fundamentalist but Ennahda is regarded

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<sup>76</sup> “Muslim Brotherhood Claims Victory,” [www.nu.nl](http://www.nu.nl), May 24, 2012, <http://www.nu.nl/buitenland/2818995/moslimbroederschap-claimt-overwinning.html>

<sup>77</sup> *De Volkskrant*, July 30, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/2823236/2011/07/30/Baarden-zijn-dominant-bij-betoging-op-Tahrirplein.dhtml>

<sup>78</sup> “Muslim Fundamentalist Storm University in Tunisia,” *NRC Handelsblad*, October 9, 2012, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/10/09/moslimfundamentalisten-bestormen-universiteit-in-tunesie/>

<sup>79</sup> *De Volkskrant* March 3, 2012, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3216102/2012/03/03/Parlement-Egypte-twist-over-invloed-islamisten-op-de-nieuwe-grondwet.dhtml>

<sup>80</sup> *De Volkskrant*, December 1, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3059943/2011/12/01/Moslim-Broederschap-wil-in-Egypte-nieuwe-regering-vormen.dhtml>

<sup>81</sup> “The Brotherhood Has Come Up with Own Presidential Candidate After All,” *NRC-Handelsblad*, March 31, 2012, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/03/31/moslim-broederschap-komt-toch-met-kandidaat-voor-presidentsverkiezingen/>

<sup>82</sup> Gert van Langendonck, “Egyptians Go to Vote for First Free Presidential Elections after Fall of Mubarak,” *NRC Next*, May 23, 2012, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/05/23/egypte-naar-stembus-voor-eerste-president-sinds-mubarak/>

<sup>83</sup> “Voorsprong Muslim Brotherhood Enormous,” *De Telegraaf*, January 11, 2012, [http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/11285805/\\_\\_\\_Voorsprong\\_Moslim\\_Broederschap\\_enorm\\_\\_\\_.html](http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/11285805/___Voorsprong_Moslim_Broederschap_enorm___.html)

<sup>84</sup> “No Majority Yet for Brotherhood,” [www.nu.nl](http://www.nu.nl), January 21, 2012, <http://www.nu.nl/buitenland/2720690/net-geen-meerderheid-broederschap-egypte.html>

<sup>85</sup> “Police Intervenes during Attack Tunisian Fundamentalists on TV Station,” *NRC Handelsblad*, October 9, 2011, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/10/09/politie-grijpt-in-bij-aanval-tunesische-fundamentalisten-op-tv-station/>

“from a fundamentalist perspective as the most progressive [movement].” The criterion is whether the movement intends to implement the sharia and Ennahda, she believes it does not.<sup>86</sup> But one wonders why Ennahda is still fundamentalist if it no longer intends to implement the sharia? What meaning does the term fundamentalism have when it is brought in connection with moderate, as fundamentalist always has the connotation of “radical” in liberal newspapers.

Most newspapers try to discredit Salafism by quoting the most controversial opinions uttered by its members. Unlike the Brotherhood, for instance, Salafis are not interested in protecting the rights of minorities and individual freedom.<sup>87</sup> Women candidates in the elections were placed at the end of the lists and their pictures were replaced by flowers. They threatened to impose Islamic law on issues such as clothing, films, alcohol, and banking. But for a long time, *de Volkskrant* did not see the Salafis as a threat to Egypt because it regarded them as too far apart from the Brotherhood to make a coalition.<sup>88</sup>

In many newspapers, Salafism is also associated with violence.<sup>89</sup> Much attention was given to the Salafi attack on the University of Sousse in Tunisia on October 8, 2011 because the university had refused the entrance of the women dressed in *niqab*,<sup>90</sup> or the attack on the TV station that broadcast the film *Persepolis*.<sup>91</sup>

### Op-eds and interviews

The Muslim Brotherhood receives vigorous debates in the opinion pages of the newspapers. These are almost always negative and clichés are endlessly repeated. Many op-ed writers do not associate the Muslim Brotherhood with democracy. One commentator stated that voting in a rich suburb of Amsterdam is quite different than voting in Egypt. For Islamist freedom and democracy are the means to bring “down the last barriers between religion and state.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> “The Year of the Arabic Spring, Part I: Tunisia,” *NRC Handelsblad*, December 26, 2011, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/12/26/het-jaar-van-de-arabische-lente-tunesie/>

<sup>87</sup> *De Volkskrant*, March 3, 2012,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3216102/2012/03/03/Parlement-Egypte-twist-over-invloed-islamisten-op-de-nieuwe-grondwet.dhtml>

<sup>88</sup> Remco Anderson, *de Volkskrant*, December 5, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/3064179/2011/12/05/Islamitisch-blok-in-Egypte-nog-lang-niet-zeker.dhtml>

<sup>89</sup> *De Volkskrant*, December 1, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3059943/2011/12/01/Moslim-Broederschap-wil-in-Egypte-nieuwe-regering-vormen.dhtml>

<sup>90</sup> “Muslim Fundamentalist Storm University in Tunisia,” *NRC Handelsblad*, October 9, 2012,

<http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/10/09/moslimfundamentalisten-bestormen-universiteit-in-tunesie/>

<sup>91</sup> *De Volkskrant*, December 31, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/3100244/2011/12/31/Arabische-Lente.dhtml>

<sup>92</sup> Willem Melching, “Democracy and Freedom mean Something Else in the Middle East than in Buitenveldert,” *de Volkskrant*, October 25, 2011,



The political scientist Hala Naoum Nehmé is perhaps the most negative in stating opinions. After Mubarak's fall, she warned against the Muslim Brotherhood taking over power, and their chance of establishing an Islamic state. She regards all the researchers, such as the well-known Dutch *sharia* expert Ruud Peters, as “academically irresponsible” for not realizing the dangers of the Brotherhood. She refers, for instance, to the editor of this book, Dr. Lorenzo Vidino, for a more critical view of the Brotherhood, warning of its long-term strategy to gain world supremacy. She quotes French experts who support the double language theory, and believe that the Brotherhood upholds a “very violent discourse” and that “its program differs from what it really thinks.” It does not recognize the equality of men and women, the rights of minorities, or a peace treaty with Israel. She believes the Brotherhood, although it contains radical, moderates and pragmatists, the first dominate the movement, referring to Muhammad Badie's support of Sayyid Qutb. She ends her article with the more familiar idea that researchers can never be sure whether the Muslim Brotherhood is not a wolf in sheep's clothes.<sup>93</sup>

In a later article, written just before the parliamentary elections, she compared the Muslim Brotherhood's chances of winning with fascists, racists and separatists gaining power by democratic means. As only Islamists will be in the race, it will be a competition about who is the best Muslim. Democracy can lead to “illiberal democrats,” as happened with Hamas. It is not important whether the system is democratic but whether it is liberal-democratic. Only in the latter case, can a real democracy with guarantees for individual freedoms be assured. The presupposed aim is that the Muslim Brotherhood will implement the policy it has been striving for during the past 83 years. She is stridently against the acceptance of a Brotherhood government, because “it will not meet the minimum democratic demands.”<sup>94</sup>

The most famous Dutch critic of political Islam, or even Islam, is Ayaan Hirsi Ali. She has repeatedly commented on the aspirations of the Muslim Brotherhood. Not surprisingly, she accused the Brotherhood of being both power hungry and extremely efficient in “embedding itself in society,” while trading in “dreams.” She used the usual clichés that the Brotherhood is supported by Saudi Arabia and oil money and that it will implement the sharia—without explaining what that might mean. Although she also subscribes to the view that the Brotherhood is not trustworthy, she uses the word *taqiya* (dissimulation) in referring to the Brotherhood. Although this word is only used in relation to Shi'ism and never to Sunnism, adding another source of confusion to the already

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<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/2989524/2011/10/25/Vrijheid-en-democratie-betekenen-iets-anders-in-het-Midden-Oosten-dan-in-Buitenveldert.dhtml>

<sup>93</sup> Hala Naoum Nehmé, “Brothers Want Sharia Not Freedom,” *de Volkskrant*,

<sup>94</sup> Hala Naoum Nehmé, “What Will (Rosenthal Dutch foreign minister, RM) Do When the Muslim Brotherhood Wins?,” *de Volkskrant*, October 13, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/2966220/2011/10/13/Wat-doet-Rosenthal-als-de-Moslim-Broederschap-de-verkiezingen-in-Egypte-wint.dhtml>

confused idea of what political Islam is. She repeats the slogan that the Brotherhood claims that a vote for it, is a vote for Islam.<sup>95</sup>

Not everyone is against the Muslim Brotherhood, however. Petra Stienen, a former diplomat, has promoted the idea that Arabs should find their own way and be allowed to choose whoever they want.<sup>96</sup> But she is often portrayed as naive. The only other article I have been able to find that was positive—in the sense that the Muslim Brotherhood must be given a chance—was written by the author of this article and his colleague, Bertus Hendriks.<sup>97</sup>

It would seem that Islamism is the only topic discussed in the Arab Spring. But this is not the case. Opinion polls showed that the Dutch were afraid of the rising tide of refugees, rising oil prices and terror. One poll showed that general opinion had improved towards the Tunisians and Egyptian but that the image of the Middle East as a whole had not improved.<sup>98</sup>

## Conclusion

This article has tried to show that the attitudes toward the Muslim Brotherhood, or political Islam, are closely tied to, first and foremost, domestic affairs, such as secularization and emancipation from the church; a distaste of mixing politics and religion; the migration of Muslim migrants to the Netherlands at a time when religion was in decline and the rise of Islamism in the Middle East when the Netherlands was going in an opposite direction; simple ignorance of Islam and especially of “political Islam”; and finally, the rise of populist parties and their use of Islam for their political purposes. The Dutch response to political Islam has, therefore, less to do with the Muslim Brotherhood, which hardly exists in the Netherlands, despite the brief “scare” about the two mosques that were supposedly in the “grip of extremists,” than with the long term trends in Dutch society.

The result has been that Islam and political Islam increasingly attracted attention. The major reason is that the Right was unable to analyze the situation of Muslim migrants separately from Islam and ascribed their deplorable condition to religious factors instead of economic and social factors. This led to a vicious spiral of radicalization on both sides, each one adopting a more extreme position, leading to the “insult as art” of Theo van Gogh, and the populism of Geert Wilders and increasing interest in Islam and finally the Hofstad group on the other side.

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<sup>95</sup> Ayaan Hirsi Ali, “Yes to Islam, No to Sharia,” *de Volkskrant*, February 7, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/2448117/2011/02/07/Ja-tegen-islam-nee-tegen-sharia.dhtml>

<sup>96</sup> De Volkskrant, February 19, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1836332/2011/02/19/Veel-Egyptenaren-zijn-net-zoals-ik.dhtml>

<sup>97</sup> Bertus Hendriks and Roel Meijer, “Utopische Broeders zijn realisten geworden,” *de Volkskrant*, February 18, 2011, <http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/?id=8327>

<sup>98</sup> Janny Groen, “Gegrepen’ door de Arabische lente,” *de Volkskrant*, April 16, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1876056/2011/04/16/Gegrepen-door-Arabische-lente.dhtml>

The analysis of the Muslim Brotherhood in Dutch newspapers in this period reflected this crisis and was heavily biased, based on hearsay and scare mongering. The Brotherhood was always described as “fundamentalist,” “radical,” “ultra-orthodox,” bent on world domination. Articles seldom made an in-depth analysis of the group. None of the more recent articles makes a serious analysis of the Brotherhood, although they have greatly improved, especially after the Arab Spring.

By the time the Dutch realized that Islamic terrorism was an isolated and limited affair and Islam as an issue seemed to have declined in importance in the public debate, the Arab Spring occurred.

The positive result of the Arab Spring is that it showed that Islam was not an issue in the protests and that the Dutch could relate to what was happening. The coverage of the Muslim Brotherhood improved. The prejudicial sobriquets declined and events were analyzed more in depth. Some newspapers now made distinctions between the different factions within the movement. An awareness seemed to grow that it is primarily a political movement. Despite the greater insight, mistakes were still made and always in relation to connecting different movements and persons with violence and extremism.

It seems also that the improved image of the Brotherhood is linked to the greater notoriety of Salafism. Salafism has taken over the role of the Brotherhood as the religious bogeyman. But here as well, newspapers do not always understand what Salafism means. Sometimes it is associated with the nineteenth form of Salafism of Muhammad Abduh that had “radicalized” afterwards.<sup>99</sup>

To what extent this situation will continue in the future remains to be seen. At the moment most newspapers seem to support the Brotherhood because it has won the general and presidential elections and, therefore, has a legitimate claim to power. Although a newspaper such as *NRC Handelsblad* is not enthusiastic about the Brotherhood, it cannot openly root for the military.<sup>100</sup> But this could change if the Brotherhood would promote implementing sharia. But the reaction of Minister of Foreign Affairs Ben Bot, at the time the WRR report was published,—to refuse any contacts with the Brotherhood—seems to be past. If the Brotherhood leads a government, the Dutch government can no longer boycott the Brotherhood. This in itself will lead to more study of the movement. It cannot refuse to deal with a legitimately elected government.

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<sup>99</sup> *De Volkskrant*, December 1, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3059943/2011/12/01/Moslim-Broederschap-wil-in-Egypte-nieuwe-regering-vormen.dhtml>

<sup>100</sup> See for instance the commentary of the newspaper, “The ‘Counter-coup’ of Morsi,” *NRC Handelsblad*, July 9, 2012, p. 2.

# Germany and the Muslim Brotherhood

By Guido Steinberg

Germany's policy toward the Muslim Brotherhood has included a domestic and a foreign policy dimension ever since the first Brothers arrived in Germany during the 1950s. Although German policymakers do not seem to have seen any connection between the two fields of action, policies in both were until recently characterized by a rejection of the Brotherhood. In domestic politics, organizations connected to the Muslim Brotherhood were first granted an official role by the federal government in 2006, albeit reluctantly. In foreign policy, the Muslim Brotherhood was only recognized as a potential partner after the Arab uprisings in 2011 and the subsequent empowerment of the Islamists made clear that Berlin could not ignore the movement any more.

Germany's policy towards the Muslim Brotherhood went through three distinct phases. In the first phase, which lasted from the late 1950s to 1979, relations were shaped by a profound lack of understanding of the phenomenon and the significance of the rise of Islamism in general and the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood in particular. Interest in and contacts with the Brotherhood were largely confined to the intelligence services. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 until 2010, Islamism and the Muslim Brotherhood gained more attention by the German government, although many policymakers did not grasp the significance yet either. Islamism was still seen largely as a backward-oriented movement which would not play any major role in the future of the Arab and Muslim worlds. Nevertheless, incomprehension was now complemented by a rejection of Islamist aspirations. As a consequence, even after 1979, it was still the German intelligence services which took care of the few contacts to the Muslim Brotherhood.

This second phase of rejection might, however, can be subdivided into two sub-phases. In 2001, the attacks in New York and Washington prompted the German security authorities to take a closer look at the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as other Islamist organizations. In parallel, the German Foreign Office decided to task a newly founded section in its cultural affairs department with establishing contacts with a variety of Muslim activists worldwide, including the Muslim Brotherhood. Nevertheless, it remained official policy to reject all contacts to the Muslim Brotherhood. Rather, the German government increased its support for authoritarian regimes in the Arab world in order to improve its counterterrorism capabilities.

As a result, in 2011 after it became clear that Germany would play a major role in the so-called transformation states in the Arab world, especially in Tunisia and Egypt, the country had to devise a totally new policy regarding the Islamists. This third phase, which started after the Arab Spring, is one of cautious engagement, in which Germany has pragmatically reacted to new realities, giving up its former policies of rejection and accepting the political roles the Muslim Brethren now played or were about to play. This attitude mirrors the generally guarded nature of German Middle East

policies and the relative lack of importance German foreign policy has placed on the Muslim Brotherhood's home countries in North Africa.

## 1. The Muslim Brotherhood in Germany

The history of relations between Germany and the Brotherhood began on German soil when the latter built a presence in the country in the late 1950s. This process was hardly noticed by the German body politic and the public, but it was of utmost importance to the Brotherhood's development in Western Europe. The organization first gained a foothold in Germany when the Geneva-based Egyptian Said Ramadan (1926-1995), a close confidant and son-in-law of the founder of the Muslim brotherhood, Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949), took control of a Commission which had as its stated goal the construction of a mosque in Munich in southern Germany in 1961.

### *Said Ramadan and the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Germany*

Ramadan had had to leave Egypt after the Free Officers' government crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in 1954. From exile in Geneva, he laid the foundations for the emergence of the Brotherhood's network in Europe. Munich became an early center of these efforts. In the 1950s and 1960s, West Germany became an increasingly popular destination for Arab students who studied engineering, medicine and sciences at its universities. Ramadan himself studied law at Cologne University and earned his Ph.D. in 1959 with a thesis on Islamic law.<sup>1</sup> Together with a group of Arab student supporters he then took over an earlier project of building a mosque in Munich.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1960s, under the leadership of the Syrian-Italian Ghalib Himmat (born 1939) a trusted aide of Ramadan, and in cooperation with the Egyptian businessman Yusuf Nada, the mosque (also called the Islamic Center Munich) became the early headquarters of the Brotherhood in Germany and Europe.<sup>3</sup> In Himmat's years at the helm of the mosque, the Mosque Construction Commission developed into the nucleus of a network of mosques, centers and associations in all major West German cities. In 1982, this structure was named the Islamic Community of Germany (Islamische Gemeinschaft in Deutschland (IGD), the main representative of the Brotherhood in Germany, reflecting the growth of its structures in the country.<sup>4</sup> The affiliation of the mosque to the Muslim Brotherhood became perhaps most obvious between 1984 and 1987, when the prominent Egyptian brother and the Muslim Brotherhood's future supreme guide Mehdi Akef (born 1928) lived in Munich and served as head Imam of the mosque.<sup>5</sup>

Besides the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in Munich, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood was strongly represented in Aachen, close to the Belgian border, under the leadership of Issam al-Attar, one of

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<sup>1</sup> The first English edition of the text was published in 1961. Said Ramadan, *Islamic Law: Its Scope and Equity* (London: Macmillan, 1961). The thesis has been published in numerous editions and languages.

<sup>2</sup> On these events in detail cf. Johnson, Ian: *A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA, and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 2011), passim and pp. 122-123, 128, 134.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp. 157 and 190.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 197.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 194. Akef served as supreme guide between 2004 and 2010.

the most important leaders of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Although Attar served as an honorary member of the Munich mosque as well, the two branches of the Brotherhood remained independent from each other. Both were of major significance to their organizations because the repression of Muslim Brotherhood activities in Egypt and Syria forced leaders like Akef and Attar into exile, where they made use of civil liberties to develop the international structures of the Muslim Brotherhood.

### *Egyptian and Syrian Structures in Germany*

The indifference of the German government allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to build larger structures all over Germany, which were divided between the Egyptian Brotherhood with its headquarters in Munich and the Syrian Brotherhood with its headquarters in Aachen. At times, the structures cooperated intensely but they remained separate entities. While the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood has gained in importance, the Syrian branch has reduced its public visibility in recent years.

The Egyptian brothers focused their organizational efforts on the IGD, which is structured as an umbrella organization of Arab mosque associations in Germany. Its headquarters remain in the Islamic Center in Munich, but it controls other Islamic centers in Frankfurt (Main), Marburg, Nuremberg, Stuttgart, Cologne, Münster and Braunschweig and possibly other cities. Although German security sources speak about only 1,300 members of the organization, it is more influential among German Muslims than this number might suggest. One indicator is the IGD's yearly meetings, where up to several thousand predominantly young Muslims participate.<sup>6</sup> The IGD controls a number of affiliated associations, the most influential of which seems to be the Islamic Center Cologne (Islamisches Zentrum Köln) and the German Muslim Students Association (Muslim Studenten Vereinigung in Deutschland). The Islamic Center in Cologne was founded in 1978 and has been closely connected to the Turkish Islamic Community Milli Görüş, which has its headquarters in Cologne, as well. The embodiment of these connections is the Egyptian-German Ibrahim El-Zayat (born in 1968), head of the center since 1997, who has established himself as the most prominent Brotherhood representative in Germany.<sup>7</sup> Zayat rose to prominence as a leading member in several Islamist youth organizations, most notably the German Muslim Students Association, an organization of several Muslim student associations at German universities. It was founded in 1964 in Munich, and was closely connected to the Islamic Center there. Today, it is located in Cologne.

The Islamic Center Aachen, serves as the headquarters of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in Germany. In the 1960s, Arab students studying at the well-known Technical University in Aachen

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<sup>6</sup> On the conference in 2007 cp. Bundesministerium des Innern: *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2007*, Berlin 2008, p. 214. The reports of the German domestic intelligence agency (Office for the Protection of the Constitution) can be downloaded from <http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/publikationen/verfassungsschutzbericht/>

<sup>7</sup> On the Turkish Islamists in detail cp. Guido Steinberg: "Germany", in: Barry Rubin (ed.): *Guide to Islamist Movements* (Armonk NY/London: M.E. Sharpe 2010), 2 Vols., Vol. 2, pp. 459-468.

started constructing the Bilal mosque. In 1978, the Islamic Center Aachen was founded as the body responsible for the mosque association. Its head was Issam al-Attar (b. 1927), the former head of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, who left his native country in the 1950s. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Islamic Center Aachen became the headquarters of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in Europe. From the 1970s, the Brotherhood spearheaded an insurgency against the regime of the late Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad (1930-2000) which culminated in a civil war 1979-1982. Several writers have blamed the center for becoming the command center of the Syrian Islamists' insurgency against the Asad regime at that time.<sup>8</sup> The Damascus government shared that interpretation and sent secret agents who targeted Syrian Muslim Brothers in Germany. In their most publicized attack, they killed Attar's wife in his Aachen home in March 1981.<sup>9</sup> After Syrian troops subdued an uprising in the city of Hama in spring 1982, however, the insurgency quickly lost momentum and the Brotherhood's center in Aachen lost some of its former importance. Although it seems as if he lost his political importance in the early 1980s already, Attar continued to entertain relations in Belgium and France and remains a highly respected personality in Islamist circles.<sup>10</sup> He remained an important figurehead for the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in 2011 and 2012.<sup>11</sup>

The Islamic Center in Aachen maintained close relations to the Munich center just as the Syrian Muslim Brothers were closely connected to their Egyptian colleagues in Switzerland. Both Egyptians and Syrians cooperate in the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (*Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland* (ZMD)).<sup>12</sup> Some of its critics consider its current chairman, the German-Syrian Aiman Mazyek (b. 1969), as the most important representative of the Syrian branch in the Central Council. Nevertheless, the Syrians and the Islamic Center Aachen insist on their independence from the more powerful Egyptian branch.

#### *Government reactions*

Although Middle Eastern governments saw the presence of the Brotherhood on German soil as tacit support on the German government's part, the latter does not seem to have paid any attention to the presence of the Muslim Brotherhood in the country (and the significance of the Brotherhood in the Middle East) until the early 1980s. An important reason seems to have been a lack of understanding of the relevance of Islamist groupings in general. As a veteran diplomat, who followed Germany's policy towards the Muslim Brotherhood from the early 1980s, stated:

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<sup>8</sup> Karl Binswanger: "Fundamentalisten-Filz – Getrennt marschieren, vereint schlagen?" in: Bahman Nirumand (ed.): *Im Namen Allahs. Islamische Gruppen und der Fundamentalismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Köln: Dreisam 1990, pp. 129-148 (143).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129-132.

<sup>10</sup> According to Brigitte Maréchal, the Da'wa mosque in Paris and the Al-Khalil mosque in Brussels were affiliated to Attar and the Syrian Brotherhood. Brigitte Maréchal: *The Muslim Brothers in Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 62.

<sup>11</sup> Attar appeared at several conferences of Syrian oppositionists in Istanbul. For example, Syrian exiles call for army to side with people. Reuters, July 13, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Until 1981, the Islamic Center Aachen had been a member of the IGD. Grundmann, Johannes. *Islamische Internationalisten* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2005), p. 59.

There was a prevalent view that conflicts between the Muslim Brotherhood and its governments were of no concern to Germany and that these were “domestic quarrels.” Our policymakers did not grasp the relevance of the Islamist movement because religion was widely considered to be an important factor for underdevelopment and the Islamists seemed backward-oriented while the dictatorships in the Middle East were seen as modernizing elements.<sup>13</sup>

If there was any interest in the Islamists’ activities in Germany and the Middle East, it was one that developed through the prism of the Cold War. German intelligence services appear to have seen some of the Muslim brothers in Germany as possible assets in their quest to win information as to the situation in Syria. As a diplomat with long experience in German-Syrian relations states:

In Syria, the Germans and their allies could monitor the Eastern bloc outside the Eastern bloc. There, our services could watch the latest Soviet weapons systems in action. This is why our services developed an interest in Syria and—as a consequence—in Syrian oppositionists like the Muslim Brothers on our soil.<sup>14</sup>

This prevalence of the East-West-Conflict in German official thinking on the Muslim brotherhood reflected a similar attitude of their American colleagues in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Munich. As the journalist Ian Johnson calculated, Said Ramadan probably received CIA-support for his activities, which led to the takeover of the Munich mosque by the Muslim Brotherhood in 1961. The Americans regarded their cooperation with the anti-communist Ramadan and his followers as a means to counter Soviet influence in the Third World.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, however, they did not grasp the significance of the Islamist movement for the future of the Arab world, so that they seemed to underestimate Ramadan with the consequence that they lost control of his activities.

There is no evidence that the German government accepted the presence of Arab Islamists in the country because it wanted to exert pressure on their home countries. If anything, the intelligence services might have been interested in individual personalities who they wanted to use as informants on the situations in their home countries. Instead, the German authorities acted inconsistently: they closely supervised the Munich mosque in its first years, but then appeared to have lost interest. Although they had a superficial knowledge of the Muslim Brotherhood’s presence in Germany from the 1960s, they paid little attention to the organization and its transnational contacts. This only changed in 2001, with increased scrutiny of Islamist actors and their transnational relations. As a domestic intelligence officer who formerly worked on the Muslim Brotherhood recounts:

We only woke up after 9/11. Suddenly, we were asking ourselves questions about organized Islam in Germany and we realized how well the IGD was connected to the international MB. Most strikingly, we found out about its relations to the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE), the coordination center of MB activities in Europe. From then on, interest in the Muslim Brotherhood

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<sup>13</sup> Author’s Interview with German diplomat, Berlin, June 4, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, *A Mosque in Munich*, pp. 128, 171.



in Germany never subsided again and media reporting about the MB connections of personalities like Ibrahim El-Zayat kept politicians' interest in these developments high. Debates about whether to accept the MB as a potential partner in government initiatives gained special importance in the run-up to the German Islam Conference.<sup>16</sup>

The German Islam Conference (Deutsche Islamkonferenz) was convened by the Federal Interior Ministry in September 2006, with the stated goal to work out a binding agreement on guidelines for the interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims in Germany. The Brotherhood was represented among the five Muslim umbrella organizations by the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (ZMD) and gained official recognition with its participation. This policy of limited engagement by the German government was, however, restricted to the domestic scene, where the ZMD seemed to be such an essential player that the government thought it could not ignore him. With regard to the Brotherhood in the Middle East, rejection remained the rule until 2011.

## **2. Germany and the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East until 2010**

German policies regarding the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world partly mirror domestic policies in Germany. There, Islamism in general and the Brotherhood in particular played no role whatsoever in official thinking until the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Then, incomprehension turned into rejection. One of the reasons for this negative attitude was the widespread anti-Semitism of the Muslim Brotherhood, especially among its Egyptian and Palestinian followers. After 2001, there was a new awareness of the importance of the Muslim Brotherhood and its transnational structures, and debates over whether to establish contacts with the organization intensified. However, in the post 9/11-world, the authoritarian regimes in the region were seen as necessary allies in the fight against terrorism. As a consequence, the German government intensified its counterterrorism cooperation with countries like Egypt, Algeria, Jordan, Syria and Kuwait, while continuing its rejection of any contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood. Thereby, the German government effectively supported the regimes against their Islamist opposition. However, the German neglect of the Muslim Brotherhood conformed to the broader outlines of German Middle East Policy.<sup>17</sup>

### *German Middle East Policy*

For the last decades, Germany's Middle East Policy has focused on three topics: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, relations with Iran and—if one accepts the definition of Turkey as a Middle Eastern state—to Turkey. In this larger framework, Germany at times developed good relations to Arab states—especially Egypt. Yet, if there were any political dimension to these relations, it usually revolved around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and did not reflect any deeper interest in Egypt (or the Arab world in general). As a consequence, the question of whether to build relations with the Muslim Brotherhood was not seen as especially relevant for Germany. Considering the

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<sup>16</sup> Author's Interview with German Intelligence official, June 1, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> For an introduction into German Middle East Policy until 2009, see. Guido Steinberg (ed.): *German Middle East and North Africa Policy: Interests, Strategies, Options* (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2009) (SWP Research Papers 9/2009).

preoccupation with Israel's survival and the Muslim Brotherhood's anti-Israeli attitudes, it is easy to understand why the German government kept its officials from building even low-level contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood. As a diplomat stationed in Egypt in the 1990s recalls:

When I was working in the German Embassy in Cairo in the 1990s, I was not allowed to establish contacts with the MB. There was no official prohibition, but it was clear to everyone that this was out of the question. At the same time, there was a division of labor between the diplomats and the spooks. The BND [i.e. foreign intelligence] resident in Cairo did talk to the Brothers. This general attitude towards the MB only changed in 2011.<sup>18</sup>

After 2001, Germany added a new dimension to its Middle East Policies by intensifying its relations with Arab Gulf countries, especially the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. This policy was started by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder between 2003 and 2005, when he visited the Gulf countries twice, and followed by his successor Angela Merkel and several members of her cabinet, who made the GCC countries an important destination. Although this policy primarily reflected commercial interests (and from 2008 a growing desire to bring Gulf investments to Europe), it was paralleled by a slowly growing awareness of the Arab countries' importance of the region.

This new German policy towards the Gulf was affected by changes in the European Union's policy as well. Germany has always been an avid supporter of a European Common Security and Foreign Policy (CSFP) that really deserves this name.<sup>19</sup> As one consequence, the European dimension is often important for an analysis of German foreign policy. This is mainly due to the fact that Germany, unlike other major European countries, has made multilateralism its favored approach in international affairs. For Germany, multilateralism after 1949 meant regaining sovereignty, while for Britain and France it meant relinquishing sovereign powers, causing them to hesitate. Even after reunification in 1990 and full sovereignty in 1992, Germany stuck to this approach, although there were hints during Chancellor Schröder's government (1998-2005) that Germany might become a more assertive partner than it had been until the late 1990s.

During these years, Germany developed a keener interest in North Africa. Until the 1990s, an implicit labor-sharing agreement had been in force, according to which France together with Spain and Italy took the lead in the EU's relations to the southern Mediterranean. At the same time, Germany focused on the EU's extension into Eastern Europe. In the late 1990s, however, this changed when Germany began to show a keener interest in Mediterranean affairs. This was mainly due to the treaty of Schengen which came into force in 1995 and the treaty of Amsterdam of 1999, which abolished intra-European borders between the signatories. Although not all borders were opened, Germany, Italy and Spain were part of the treaties so that the German borders had in fact advanced to the Mediterranean coasts. Therefore,—and because migration from North Africa is a

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<sup>18</sup> Author's interview with German diplomat, Berlin, June 4, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Volker Perthes: Germany, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East: Approaching the Region through Europe, in: Haim Goren (ed.): Germany and the Middle East. Past, Present, and Future (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Press 2003), pp. 161-170 (p.162).

major preoccupation for Germany—Berlin was forced to define its own interests and approaches to the southern Mediterranean and engage with the countries of the region. Security aspects were paramount in this policy.

### *Counterterrorism*

Countering jihadist terrorism became the most pressing of these issues after the 9/11 attacks. Among German policymakers, there was an awareness that the threat originated in the Arab world. Consequently, the government's policies after 2001 were mostly aimed at containing violence in the region. This became especially urgent when the invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to a wave of terrorist attacks in Europe primarily aimed at those countries which had sent troops to the country to assist the U.S. effort. Since 2007, European security agencies feared above all that North African terrorism could stretch out to Europe. Therefore, to prevent terrorist activity from having negative repercussions on the resolution of regional conflicts and the stability of individual states, the German government decided that it must help Arab governments to keep these groups under control. Stability rather than change became the paradigm of German relations to the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>20</sup>

As a consequence, the German government intensified its security cooperation with several Arab governments. This cooperation was also initiated because of the lack of expertise by the German security authorities, most notably the Federal Intelligence Service (Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND)). For decades, it had focused its activities on the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact and, therefore, suffered from a serious lack of Middle East specialists and Arabic speakers. Consequently, the services aimed at fostering cooperation with those countries where most of the al Qaeda terrorists came from, and counterterrorism cooperation with countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait and Syria was intensified. Some German observers realized that this cooperation was problematic, because it might help these authoritarian regimes to use equipment, training, and finances provided by the West to fight not only al Qaeda-style jihadists, but also the other parts of their Islamist opposition and thereby consolidate their rule. Nevertheless, the government opted for Realpolitik and did not follow up on its rhetoric demanding political reform and respect for human rights. As a result, while the German government and the European Union defined political reform and democratization as goals of their Middle East policies, the reality was obviously much different.

However, this conflict of goals was never systematically debated in Germany. This became clear in winter 2007–08, when a commission of inquiry into the activities of the BND discussed cooperation that occurred in 2002 between the German government (then a coalition of Social Democrats and Greens) and Syria. Whereas the German side had hoped to gain information about jihadist networks, the Syrian government was interested above all in surveillance of Syrian dissidents in Germany—among them the Muslim Brotherhood. The BND had quickly ended the cooperation

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<sup>20</sup> This section is based on the author's "Countering Jihadist Terrorism," in: Guido Steinberg (ed.): *German Middle East and North Africa Policy: Interests, Strategies, Options* (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2009): (SWP Research Papers 9/2009), pp. 15-21.

because the benefits seemed limited. But rather than discussing the broader implications of a strategy which resulted in the strengthening of authoritarian regimes, critics complained that the German government had cooperated with a state where prisoners were often tortured. Besides this episode, cooperation with Arab governments drew little attention.<sup>21</sup>

The period post 9/11 saw some bureaucratic changes which also affected German policy towards the Middle East and indirectly the Muslim Brotherhood. As the terrorist threat became a more important topic in relation to the region, the German Interior Ministry became an increasingly important player. In fact, the German government conducted counterterrorism activities with partners in the region as an extension of domestic interior policy and counterterrorism. Its policies were part of a move in which the Interior Ministry after 2001 massively expanded international cooperation, especially with EU member states and the United States, but also with Middle Eastern countries. Cooperation in the Middle East focused on states where the security agencies identified threats to Germany, but was also influenced by foreign policy orientation so that pro-Western regimes profited most. The most important field of cooperation in 2008 and 2009 was North Africa, primarily with Algeria but later also with Morocco and Egypt. This policy mirrored a threat perception according to which al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb was feared to expand terrorist operations to Europe. Besides, the German government intensified its cooperation with Jordanian and Kuwait security forces. Beyond that, the Interior Ministry also showed a clear interest in working with Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Syria and other countries that have produced many terrorists and/or have been targets of terrorist attacks.

### **3. Germany and the Muslim Brotherhood from 2011**

The dominance of the security and counterterrorism paradigm hindered the German government from establishing closer links to the Muslim Brotherhood before 2011. Although the Foreign Office stuck to its rejection of any political contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood even after 2001, some diplomats realized that they needed to know more about developments in the Arab and Muslim worlds. In 2002, this resulted in the inauguration of an initiative entitled “Dialogue with the Islamic world,” as a part of the Foreign Office’s cultural outreach program. A special representative was appointed as its head, given a small staff of specialists in Berlin and new jobs were created at the embassies. The special representatives and the “network of specialists”<sup>22</sup> mentioned in the official description established first contacts with Muslim Brotherhood representatives and other Islamists worldwide. Although this was not official policy, it paved the way for the first more substantial contacts after the beginning of the Arab Spring by increasing the Foreign Office’s knowledge of

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<sup>21</sup> Exceptions were a short debate about cooperation with Libya starting in April 2008, when news broke that the BND had taken part in the training of Libyan security forces. In the course of the discussion, the more general question to what extent Germany should cooperate with authoritarian regimes in the Arab world played a (limited) role.

<sup>22</sup> Auswärtiges Amt Interkultureller Dialog ([http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/KulturDialog/InterkulturellerDialog/IslamDialog\\_node.html](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/KulturDialog/InterkulturellerDialog/IslamDialog_node.html)). In 2007, the name was changed to “special representative for intercultural dialogue.”

relevant Islamist actors. According to a diplomat formerly involved in the program: “These guys were allowed to do things that others were not and the aim was to build capabilities our side.”<sup>23</sup> Critics, however, saw this “Islam dialogue” as a way for the Foreign Office to reverse former budget cuts and as evidence pointed to the fact that many of the “specialists” were career diplomats with no prior knowledge of the topic. Nevertheless, this was one of only two initiatives with which the German government could claim to have prepared for the events unfolding in the Middle East in 2011. There was no major resistance, however, against the Foreign Office building first contacts not only to Muslim, but also to Islamist politicians. From 2009, officials and later parliamentarians took part in several multilateral meetings involving European governments and Muslim Brothers from most countries of the Middle East. These trust-building steps contributed to the development of a new German policy in 2011.

*On the Way to a New Policy (A Strategy Paper)*

Like all its Western counterparts, the German government was taken by surprise when the revolutions started in North Africa in December 2010. The official reaction was cautious and largely incoherent and remained so until late 2011, although Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle travelled to Tunis and Cairo in early 2011 promising support for the revolutions in these two countries. At the same time, parliamentarians and high-ranking bureaucrats called for engaging the Muslim Brotherhood in a dialogue, expecting the movement to play a role in Tunisia, Egypt and possibly other countries.<sup>24</sup> In most of these cases, the proponents of an opening toward the Brothers hoped that by integrating them into democratic political processes, they might moderate their positions. The oft-mentioned model was the moderation undergone by the Turkish Justice and Development Party, headed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, after they came to power in 2002.<sup>25</sup> Although this argument is more popular with left-of-center politicians and therefore with the opposition, leading foreign policy specialists of the ruling conservative-liberal coalition subscribed to it as well.

The lack of any coherent strategy regarding the revolutions in the Arab world became obvious when the civil war in Libya started in February 2011 and Germany’s NATO allies including the United States, France, Britain and Italy decided to intervene militarily together with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Most problematically, Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, a Free Democrat (FDP), had expressed his support enthusiastically for the North Africa revolutions and had presented conditions for Germany taking part in any military campaign in support of the Libyan rebels. These conditions had included a UN mandate allowing for military action and the support of the Arab League for such an endeavor. Westerwelle does not appear to have expected both conditions to be fulfilled, so that his subsequent rejection of a military intervention was highly embarrassing to the

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<sup>23</sup> Author’s interview with German diplomat, Berlin, June 4, 2012.

<sup>24</sup> The most prominent voice was Ruprecht Polenz, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Reuters, February 1, 2011 (CDU – Außenpolitiker – Dialog mit ägyptischen Muslimbrüdern suchen).

<sup>25</sup> Interview with the Green Party parliamentarian and former Minister of State in the Foreign Office (2002-2005) Kerstin Müller, in: Deutsche Welle, September 21, 2011 (Keine Panik vor den Muslimbrüdern).

German government. On March 17, 2011, Germany abstained together with Russia and China, when its allies passed UN Security Council resolution 1973, paving the way for the NATO campaign in Libya and the subsequent fall of the Gaddafi regime. In the run-up to the intervention, Germany even withdrew its personnel from NATO units involved in the war.

Although the Foreign Minister drew most criticism for the decision to reject the Libya campaign, his stance mirrored the whole government's preferences. While Westerwelle tried to justify the decision in public, it had unanimously been taken by the Chancellor Angela Merkel, Defense Minister Thomas de Maizière and the Foreign Minister, with Westerwelle's vote arguably being less important than Merkel's. When in August 2011, Westerwelle still contended that international sanctions had mainly been responsible for the Gaddafi regime's fall, large parts of a disbelieving public demanded his resignation.<sup>26</sup> But with events quickly developing in other Arab countries and more pressing issues like the "Euro-crisis," the episode soon lost its importance. Nevertheless, the German government had another reason to proceed carefully in its policies towards the Arab uprisings.

During summer and autumn 2011, it became clear that the Brotherhood would play an important role in the emerging political systems in Tunisia and Egypt, so that Westerwelle's diplomats began to prepare for such an eventuality. In November 2011, after the Islamist Nahda-Party had won more than 40 percent of the vote in the Tunisian parliamentary elections, the Foreign Office prepared an internal paper presenting outlines for a strategy of cautious engagement with the Islamists in the Arab world. According to Foreign Ministry officials, the paper was an effort to establish a common working basis for the European Union and prepare the German parliament and parts of the public for a possible success of the Muslim Brotherhood in the parliamentary elections in Egypt (which were to start in November and last until January 2012).<sup>27</sup>

The paper's authors assumed that events in the Arab world would result in "a more influential role for political Islam" and that moderate Islamist parties—moderate in the sense that they adhere to non-violence, rule of law and democracy—have already emerged or are likely to emerge as strongest parties in elections in Tunisia, Egypt and other countries and are likely to be in a strong position to influence the constitutional process in Tunisia and Egypt.<sup>28</sup>

The document expressly named the Muslim Brotherhood as one of these "moderate Islamist parties" and movements, but also added words of caution and hints at benchmarks for judging the moderation of the respective Islamist groups:

Generally, moderate Islamist groups stress adherence to principles of democracy, rule of law and human rights. However, it remains to be seen how these theoretical positions are translated into political actions under democratic conditions. In addition, important differences in understanding

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<sup>26</sup> *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 27, 2011 (Westerwelle vollzieht Kehrtwende bei Nato Militäreinsatz).

<sup>27</sup> Author's interview with group of German diplomats, Berlin, June 4, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> *Non-Paper: Political Islam*, Berlin, November 2011.

(compared to Western interpretation) exist regarding the role of religion, minorities and women's rights.<sup>29</sup>

The most expressly formulated reservation concerns the Muslim Brotherhood's relations towards Israel:

Even moderates express strong anti-Israeli rhetoric and positions and they are likely to exploit public opinion in elections. At the same time, moderate Islamist and MB affiliated groups take a rather soft stance at the moment and have publicly subscribed to the importance of regional stability and the respect of international treaties.<sup>30</sup>

Based on these assumptions, the paper goes on to formulate guidelines for dealing with Islamist actors, the most important being that the European Union should be ready for a dialogue with the fore-mentioned moderate Islamists:

As moderate Islamist groups will be important political actors we should be ready for dialogue with these groups. While not disregarding ideological differences we need to be in a position to engage in discussions about concrete political, economic and social issues.<sup>31</sup>

According to the document, the embassies should be tasked "to intensify contacts with moderate Islamist parties." Then it defines important qualifications:

To identify groups that qualify for dialogue, we need to apply criteria, such as: adherence to the principles of democracy, rule of law, plurality and human rights, rejection of political violence, respect of international obligations and treaties, a constructive approach to regional issues in the Middle East. With regard to Israel, the two-state-solution and the Arab Peace Initiative we should articulate clear expectations.<sup>32</sup>

The message of the paper was clear: Germany would cooperate with the Nahda-Party in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, but it would not accept the rule of Hamas in the Palestinian territories even if it won elections again. Quite surprisingly for some of the authors, there was little resistance to the proposals. This held true for the European Union, where France had been reluctant to agree to an engagement of the Islamists up to that point, but also for the German parliament. When the Foreign Office's commissioner for the Middle East presented the gist of the paper in a session of the Foreign Affairs committee in the Bundestag, even conservative parliamentarians offered no resistance. Meanwhile, the paper had been given to some journalists, who reported about

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Non-Paper: Political Islam, Berlin, November 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

the new engagement policy without causing any public stir, effectively showing that the debate had ended before it had really started.<sup>33</sup>

### *Implementation of a New Policy*

Part of the reason why the November 2011 strategy paper provoked little resistance was that it was cautiously worded and formulated several conditions for cooperation, which—according to diplomats—were designed to reduce possible resistance against the engagement of the Islamists. Some officials argue that the paper had become obsolete after the election victory of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, because “it does not make sense to formulate benchmarks when the Islamists are already in power.”<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, from November 2011, the paper’s content informed the official German policy regarding the Brotherhood.

In parallel, the Foreign Office and Westerwelle began to promote a cautious engagement of the Muslim Brotherhood in North Africa, beginning with the Minister’s confirmation in November 2011 that Germany had indeed established contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood. Westerwelle explicitly mentioned the Turkish AKP of Prime Minister Erdogan as a possible model for Islamists in the Arab world. Yet, he defined “red lines” for all political forces in the Arab world aiming at building relations with the Europeans, namely “to abstain from violence, and to profess democracy, the rule of law, pluralism just like peace at home and abroad.” He added: “Because in this regard we always have to bear the security interests of Israel in mind.”<sup>35</sup> Although these ideas were crucial to a fundamental change in German policy towards the Muslim Brothers, there was no major resistance. In the following months, the government elaborated its new strategy and put some of it into practice.

Following a visit to Tunisia in January 2012, Westerwelle presented a more elaborate version of his ideas when, in an article in the conservative daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, he argued that “Political Islam is not the same as radical Islamism.” Refusing to call the Muslim brothers “Islamists” he named them “islamically-oriented forces” and highlighted the successes of “moderate-islamic parties,” who had won pluralities of votes in Morocco and Tunisia. Again, he named the Turkish AKP as a role model for an Islamist party taking part in democratic political processes. Especially important in a German context, the Foreign Minister uttered his hope that “moderate Islamic forces” would establish “Muslim democrat parties,” thereby drawing a parallel to the Christian democrats in Germany. Again, he referred to the red lines, and promised support for

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<sup>33</sup> Report about the paper in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 15, 2011 (Ende der Vorbehalte. Bundesregierung strebt Dialog mit Islamisten in Arabien an).

<sup>34</sup> Author’s Interview with German diplomat, Berlin, June 4, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> *Financial Times Deutschland*, November 24, 2011 (FTD-Interview mit Guido Westerwelle: Deutschland hält Kontakte zur Muslimbruderschaft).



all those who professed democracy and the rule of law, a pluralistic society, religious tolerance and peace at home and abroad.<sup>36</sup>

In the following months, the German government focused its efforts on Tunisia. During his visit to the country in January 2012, Westerwelle said that the country had the potential to become “the model country for change in the region.”<sup>37</sup> The German government promised support and upgraded its relationship with Tunisia, especially after the Tunisian Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali—a member of the Nahda-Party—visited Berlin in March 2012. At the meeting between Merkel and Jebali in Berlin in that same month both agreed to intensified “governmental cooperation” (Regierungszusammenarbeit) between Tunis and Berlin. Notably, Tunisia is the only Arab country to date with which Germany has agreed upon a “transformation dialogue” involving regular consultations between the two governments on different levels and several joint projects.<sup>38</sup> Although it remains to be seen what the practical outcome of this exercise will be, it is striking that Germany agreed to start the experiment with a country governed by Islamists of the Nahda-Party. With the other “transformation states,” German policy remained more cautious. This held especially true with regard to Egypt, where the German government established contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood just as other political players did. The same held true for Syria, where Germany built contacts to most strands of the opposition in exile, including representatives of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, without giving any support to the Islamists.

#### **4. No Engagement Strategy Yet**

Rather than following a worked-out strategy, the German government reacted to developments in the Arab world by engaging the Islamists only when it became clear, in late 2011, that they would play a major role in the new political systems in North Africa. In fact, Germany did not prepare for cooperation with the Muslim Brotherhood and similar Islamist actors in those parts of the region where governments had not (or not then) come under pressure by protest movements. Saudi Arabia and its allies, the small Gulf countries, were still regarded as stability factors in a rapidly changing environment. This became most obvious when news broke in July 2011 that the German government approved the sale of some 270 Leopard 2A7+ battle tanks to Saudi Arabia.<sup>39</sup> The chancellor’s office appears to have made this decision, giving it special importance in analyzing German Middle East Policy. Significantly, Merkel (like her predecessor) increasingly assumes responsibility concerning those topics of German Middle East policies which are considered to be of vital importance to Germany, namely the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, relations to Iran and (since 2003) the Arab Gulf countries. Events in the rest of the Arab world are being dealt with in the Foreign Ministry and the chancellor’s office only intervenes if it discovers a special interest in a certain issue. The conclusion might then be that while cooperating with Saudi Arabia is an important

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<sup>36</sup> Guido Westerwelle: Politischer Islam und Demokratie, in: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, January 13, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted after: Süddeutsche Zeitung, January 10, 2012 (Westerwelle im Musterland des Wandels).

<sup>38</sup> Author’s interview with German diplomat, Berlin, June 15, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> Spiegel online, July 2, 2011 (Deutschland will Saudi-Arabien Kampfpanzer liefern).

topic in German regional policies, relations with the Muslim Brotherhood in the transformation states—with the possible exception of Tunisia—are not of equal significance.

There is ample evidence that Germany will not alter its policies concerning those states in the region that have remained stable. Although the government did not comment publicly on the tank deal, conservative parliamentarians defended it by arguing that Saudi Arabia was a stability factor and that it needed to be supported in confronting Iran. Besides, security cooperation with countries like Jordan, Morocco and Algeria continued, effectively showing that the German government did not fundamentally change its policies. Furthermore, the government did not change its erstwhile policy of limited engagement of the Muslim Brotherhood in Germany itself, which was further evidence that its policies in the Middle East were a pragmatic reaction to events which could not be reversed.

### **Conclusion**

The German government's engagement of the Brotherhood in North Africa and the Middle East did not mirror any strategic change. Now, and in the future, the government will undoubtedly stand by and accept Islamists as partners only when they become too strong to be ignored any more in individual countries. The only condition will be that they are not openly hostile to Israel.

The most urgent question for the German government will be to what extent it will be ready to build contacts to Salafists. Strikingly, the new engagement policy toward the Islamists did not include the Salafists, which the German government considered to be more “radical” or “radical Islamist.” If they are able to play a major role in the politics of any country in the region, it is very likely that the German government will react as well.

# France and Islamist Movements: A Long Non-dialogue

By Jean-François Daguzan

France has a unique relationship with Arab countries and particularly with North African (Maghreb) states. To maintain influence and strong economic links with these countries since their independence, France was obligated to develop a policy of compromise with former colonized states or policy/economy linked countries in the Near-East. What the analysts called “*politique arabe de la France*” (Arab French Policy) aimed essentially to preserve the interests of France on the Southern and Eastern shore of the Mediterranean. This approach forced France to adapt its strategy to the *desideratas* and good will of Arab leaders, most of which have controlled these countries during the last 30 to 40 years. For these reasons, French governments have had significant difficulties engaging officially, and sometimes even informally, with the various political oppositions (except Libya during the war for Chad and the special case of the Lebanese civil war).

On the other hand, France has a unique specificity in having welcomed the largest Arab community in Europe. This situation makes France ultra-sensitive to any political or diplomatic development in the Mediterranean zone and the Arab world in general. The globalization of communication (through the Internet and satellite TV) increases this situation. In fact, the rise of Islamist movements was considered a serious problem for the stability of France, as well as a potential threat during the Algeria civil war (1992-1998). This article aims to explain the specific situation that makes France/Arab-Muslim relationship exceptional.

## The Obsession of Permanence and Exemplarity

Since their independence, France established a special relationship with Maghreb countries and a very special one with Algeria.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, France wished to appear not as the former colonizer but as the “godfather,” the close friend of each country which tacitly refused to interfere in internal affairs (including human rights); it was the post-colonial unwritten pact. The case of Algeria is different and more sensitive. To make the decolonization achieved by the Algerian people a success, France decided to transform the independence of Algeria into a model of co-operation. Significant monies were invested; training and education were given by French professors until 1975 and the energy policy was based on the principle of exemplarity for the rest of the world. To make the “Algerian dream” possible, compromises were necessary and inescapable.

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<sup>1</sup> “France and the Maghreb, the end of the special relationship?” in Yahia H. Zoubir & Haizam Amirah-Fernandez (Eds.), *North Africa, Politics, Region and the limits of transformation* (Routledge, London, 2008), pp. 331-347.

For instance, when the Algerian dissident Ali Mecili was killed in France—certainly by the Algerian intelligence service—in 1987, no official condemnation came from Paris.<sup>2</sup> Consequently France had to manage this relationship this way:

The question of interference is in the heart of this special relationship and makes any French action or declaration highly risky for bilateral links. This could explain the paranoid behaviour sometimes quoted by Euro-member States during some political discussions and the definition of a common position regarding Maghreb countries, and especially Algeria.<sup>3</sup>

Naturally, the presence in France of a large and long-established Maghreb minority contributes to this unusual situation. A Muslim community existed in France from the end of the nineteenth century (10,000 in 1895). But this community grew slowly during the first part of the twentieth century, notably with World War I (132,000 in 1918—200,000 in 1920<sup>4</sup>) and exploded when more manpower was needed to rebuild the country after War World II. The post war years brought a period of incredible economic growth, as well. After 1974, the “*regroupement familial*” (family bringing up together), authorized by the French government, welcomed migrant workers' wives and children to join, swelling the population.

Ethnic statistics are forbidden in France. As a consequence, the unofficial result obtained by various researchers or political organizations varies depending on how statistics are gathered—if the account integrates Arabs only or Muslims with French nationality, illegal immigration, or with the user's political purposes. Therefore, the size of the Arab/Muslim community could vary from 4 to 7 million without any guarantee of reliability.<sup>5</sup> In France, the sole official reference (by nationality of origin) available indicates that Tunisian community reached 234,669 persons, Algerians 713,334 and Moroccans 653,826.<sup>6</sup> Yet every count has to be questioned. The researcher Michèle Tribalat estimated the number of Muslims in 2005 through their “lineage” on three generations at 4.5 million.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the Pew Research Center estimated the number in 2010 to be 3,574

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<sup>2</sup> See, Hocine Ait Ahmed, *L’Affaire Mecili, La découverte*, coll. Poche, Paris, 2007, rééd. (1<sup>re</sup> éd. 1989) – introduction, p. V

<sup>3</sup> “France, Democratization and North Africa,” in *Democratization*, Special issue: “The European Union and Democracy Promotion: The Case of North Africa,” Richard Gillespie and Richard Young (eds.) Spring 2002, pp. 135-149. Also published as *The European Union and Democracy Promotion: The Case of North Africa*, Richard Gillespie and Richard Young (eds.), (London/Portland OR: Frank Cass, 2002), p. 136.

See also, Claire Spencer, “Algeria: France’s disarray and Europe conundrum,” in B.A. Roberson, *The Middle East and Europe* (Routledge, New York and London, 1998), pp. 170-184.

<sup>4</sup> Kamel Kateb, De l'étranger à l'immigré, et de l'ethnique au religieux : les chiffres en question ? , in Yves Charles Zarka (dir.), Sylvie Taussig (dir.) et Cynthia Fleury (dir.), *L’islam en France*, Paris, PUF, coll. Cités (no Hors-série), October, 2e éd. (1<sup>re</sup> éd. 2004), Quadriges, p. 732. (ISBN 978-2-13-055727-2), p. 38

<sup>5</sup> Former Minister of Interior Claude Guéant in Newspaper *Le Monde* , interview April 4, 2011, La loi de 1905 ne sera pas modifiée, [http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2011/04/04/le-nombre-de-musulmans-en-france-pose-probleme-selon-gueant\\_1502928\\_3224.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2011/04/04/le-nombre-de-musulmans-en-france-pose-probleme-selon-gueant_1502928_3224.html)

<sup>6</sup> Répartition des immigrés par pays de naissance 2008, Insee, October 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Michèle Tribalat: "L'islam reste une menace," *Le Monde*, October 13, 2011

million, representing 5.7 percent of the population.(In second place is Italy with an estimated 1,583 million Muslims.)<sup>8</sup>

Given these statistics, it is understandable why French authorities, during the last 30 years have had a growing concern about Islamic affairs. Obviously, the Arab community has always had a strong concern about the developments on the Eastern and Western side of the Mediterranean, although the situation varies, depending of the size of the community from the various countries.

### **The question of Islam in France**

For many years, the question of Islam in France was linked to the permanent relation/dispute with Algeria. The situation concerned the control of the Paris Mosque and the appointment of its Rector. But since the middle of the 1980s, Algerian influence diminished, in spite of the presence of the extremely talented Rector Daril Boubakeur, hurriedly called in to rescue a weakened institution. Over the last 20 years the fundamentalist movements financed by Saudi Arabia and other proselytizing organizations, such as the Pakistani *Tabligh* or the Muslim Brotherhood (with the powerful *Union of French Islamic Organizations* or UOIF<sup>9</sup>), have found a genuine echo among populations with an identity crisis and bearing the brunt of economic crisis. Black African populations, in particular, are participating in this movement and are not interested in the Maghreb “minaret wars.” For its part, the Moroccan king is doing his best to keep control of a community more closely-knit than others, but here also the limits of this strategy are becoming increasingly evident, as demonstrated by an intensifying radical agenda in that country.<sup>10</sup> Both for political and geopolitical reasons, the situation evolved along these lines.

#### *The Algerian Civil War and the Consequence on the French Perception*

During the 1960s and the 1970s, Arab militancy in France was essentially linked to the Palestine/Lebanese conundrum. With the Lebanese civil war, after 1975, and the Iran dispute in the reimbursement of the Eurodif loan,<sup>11</sup> France suffered terrorism but it was considered to be caused largely by foreign policy issues.

Certainly France progressively observed political Islam’s growing influence in Arab societies, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Middle East and emerging political parties and

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<sup>8</sup> *Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Pew Forum Report, 2010.*

<http://features.pewforum.org/muslim/number-of-muslims-in-western-europe.html>

<sup>9</sup> *Union des organisations islamiques de France*, See Michèle Tribalat, Principaux courants et associations de l’Islam français, *CEMOTI*, n33 2002, pp. 39-42.

<sup>10</sup> “France, Democratization and North Africa,” in *Democratization*, Special issue: “The European Union and Democracy Promotion: The Case of North Africa”, Richard Gillespie and Richard Young (eds.) Spring 2002, pp. 135-149. Also published as: *The European Union and Democracy Promotion: The Case of North Africa*, op. cit., pp. 136.

<sup>11</sup> During the Sha period, France received a significant loan from the Iranian government to create a civil nuclear energy in Iran. With the disappearance of the regime, French governments decided not to reimburse the Mollah regime. The Iranians decided to threaten France with terrorism to obtain the payment.

movements in Maghreb countries since the 1980s. But these movements were globally perceived as a response to the non-democratic situation in each country. In addition, France was confident about of each government's ability to control and eventually to dismantle these groups (for example, repression in Egypt after President Sadat's assassination, and the massacres of Homs and Hama in Syria).

France realized the power of Islamist movements with the Algerian civil war and the end of the democratic process in this country (1992). From the French perspective, the first stage of these events was anxious questioning. How to deal with the rupture of the democratic process? Are Islamist leaders reliable and acceptable interlocutors? The political period of "cohabitation"—in other words, the conjunction of a President, François Mitterrand, from the Socialist party and a government from the right wing—led the French position on the issue to a long period of uncertainty. Specifically, a part of the French political class proposed engaging in discussion with Islamists in order to preserve the long-term French interest in case of an Islamist victory in Algeria; others opposed such a view. For instance, the conference of Sant'Egidio in Roma (January 13, 1995) organized by an informal arm of the Vatican and attended by various Algerian political forces, including Islamist leaders, were viewed cautiously by French political circles.

But Algerian Islamists ended the suspense by attacking France in 1995, first by killing a respected French-Algerian imam, Abdelbaki Sahraoui in Paris, then by twice bombing the metro and the train system and killing many French citizens living or working in Algeria.

These events forced French authorities to tackle seriously the issue of political Islam, first by implementing a large survey of radical mosques and preachers, then by deporting what they considered the most dangerous foreign preachers living in the country, and finally by engaging in a close cooperation with the Maghreb intelligence services.

### **The Difficulty in Tackling the Question of Islam in France**

During the last 30 years, the attempts to manage Islam in France by the various French governments were always complicated and globally unsuccessful. With the first crisis in French *Banlieues* (boroughs) and the spread of violent acts of racism, the socialist governments were very disturbed by religious issues and dreaded entering a controversial religious debate about Islam. They tried to develop a concept of coexistence of community in the boroughs by respecting the differences and religions. The so called "*touche pas à mon pote!*" movement ("Don't touch my buddy!") started by socialists (essentially the youth) was successful when launched but criticized by other right and left republicans defending the old French concept of "laïcité" (secularism) and combating any form of communitarism. Finally, the concept declined and progressively disappeared.

After years of hesitations between various governments, the then Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy decided to create the French council of Muslim faiths (*Conseil français du culte musulman* - CFCM), and organized the elections and the structure of the CFCM, the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions of France (*Conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France* – CRIF). The election of

Daril Boubakeur as President of CCFM was achieved with great difficulty and marked the sharp decline of traditional forces in favor of new and more radical organizations.<sup>12</sup> Sarkozy chose to support the influence of UOIF, a very conservative Islamic organization close to the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>13</sup> This group was seen by Sarkozy's advisors as something "like an Islamic Communist Party, very structured and fond of order."<sup>14</sup> In reality, the situation was not this clear. The main lesson is the partial "de-Algerianisation" and progressively "de-maghrebisation" of Islam in France with the growing influence of African and Asian movements.

Islam in France covers a palette running from a "soft" African *Marabout*, Islamic *Salafism*, to the secular Muslims who are beginning to make themselves heard. Samir Amghar notes: "The French Islamic connection covers a wide spectrum of social practice and a plurality of religiosities which runs from a cultural relationship with the Muslim religion to more demanding religious forms."<sup>15</sup> This does not necessarily imply that the link with the country of origin is weakening: The need to "return to the village" for holidays, or to be buried there, remains very strong in all generations. But we are probably moving in time toward an "Italian" or "Spanish" attitude, in which the link with the country of origin is of a sentimental and family historical nature and that alone.<sup>16</sup>

From the government's perspective, this "French Islam" would find its path between a French way which is struggling to emerge amid a power struggle which has little to do with religion and the various siren calls of active fundamentalism.<sup>17</sup> The second set of elections for the CFCM in June 2005 confirmed this basic tendency, as well as the decline of the Paris Mosque. It also illustrated the growing Moroccan influence on the French Muslim community with the reinforcement of the national federation of French Muslims (*Fédération nationale des Musulmans de France*- FNMF). In fact, after the terrorist attacks in Casablanca (2003) and the related growth of jihadist tendencies in the country and in the Moroccan diaspora, the Moroccan government determined to strongly reinforce its control over Moroccan Islam. In 2006 the *Rassemblement des Musulmans de France* (RMF, build on the ruins of FNMF) emerged and quickly took the lead on the CFCM, electing its leader, M. Moussaoui, as president in 2008. Morocco finally took control of the CFCM over the Muslim Brotherhood-leaning UOIF. Recognizing this fact, Paris eventually negotiated with Rabat.<sup>18</sup> Finally, the "*Islam de France*" project, conceived to create a French movement, independent from outside, failed due to hard geopolitical trends. At present, Morocco, Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Muslim Brotherhood continue to influence Islam in France.

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<sup>12</sup> Défaite de la Mosquée de Paris au Scrutin pour le Conseil Musulman, *Le Monde* April 14, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> [La face cachée de l'UOIF \(entretien avec Fiammetta Venner\)](#), [lexpress.fr](#), May 2, 2005

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/01012400567-islam-le-trouble-jeu-de-nicolas-sarkozy>

<sup>15</sup> Les nouvelles voies de l'Islam de France, (report Islam de France) *Maghreb-Machrek*, Spring 2005, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> "France and the Maghreb, the end of the special relationship?", in Yahia H. Zoubir & Haizam Amirah-Fernandez (Eds.), *North Africa, Politics, Region and the limits of transformation*, op. cit., p. 333.

<sup>17</sup> Catherine Coroller, Le Conseil du Culte Musulman ensablé dans ses courants, *Libération*, September 8, 2005, p.15.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/01012400567-islam-le-trouble-jeu-de-nicolas-sarkozy>

The Sarkozy period was very interesting in this regard. As Minister of Interior, he struggled against radical Islam—for example, confronting the famous Islamist philosopher Tariq Ramadan in a TV debate. But, on the other hand, Sarkozy decided to structure Islam in France by creating a “French Islam” or “Islam from France,” to favor the rising of a national array of Imams and Islamic studies. Moreover he tried to structure the Muslim national landscape by creating an organism of dialogue supposed to be the link between the State and the Muslim community. From his position as Minister of Interior to the first years of his Presidency, Nicolas Sarkozy developed a concept of “positive Secularism.” This idea challenged the old French concept of “*Laïcité*” (Secularism) built by the end of the nineteenth century to insure the neutrality of the Republic vis-à-vis clerical powers (essentially the Catholic Church). The new concept aimed to give a more important role to religion in the defense and propagation of values and virtues in the French society and, most notably, in the areas where Muslims communities are large. Sarkozy also defended the concept of multiculturalism. Inspired by the Anglo-Saxon model, the “*multiculturalisme à la française*” wanted to defend the ethnic or religious specificities of communities living with their own cultural rules.<sup>19</sup>

During the first years of his presidency, Sarkozy continued to have positive attitudes toward religious values and to defend multiculturalist concepts. He aimed to nominate a Muslim Prefect to symbolize the change and to advise on integration. Abderrahmane Dahmane sought to create a “Council for diversity.” But over the last two years, his position changed dramatically. Sarkozy considered immigration a threat against the identity and the stability of France and Europe. Then during the 2012 presidency campaign he adopted a hard line affirming the end of multiculturalism: “It is a failure. The truth is that our democracies are too preoccupied by the identity of the person arriving but not enough by the identity of the country welcoming. [...] if somebody enters France he has to fusion with only one national community.”<sup>20</sup>

During the 2012 campaign, France’s new President François Hollande took a different position. He first advocated for the principle of Secularism (*Laïcité*), expressing his wish to include it into the Constitution. “I shall propose,” he stated, “to write the fundamental principles from the 1905 law on Secularism in the Constitution by including at Article 1<sup>st</sup> a second point so following: The Republic insures the freedom of conscience, guarantees the free practice of cults and respects the separation between Churches and the State.” (Candidate program point 40)<sup>21</sup> He also defended the principle of a legal immigration:

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/01012400567-islam-le-trouble-jeu-de-nicolas-sarkozy>

<sup>20</sup> « *C'est un échec. La vérité c'est que dans toutes nos démocraties, on s'est trop préoccupé de l'identité de celui qui arrivait et pas assez de l'identité du pays qui accueillait* , » [disait-il](#) lors de l'émission « *Paroles de Français* », la semaine dernière sur TF1. « *Si on vient en France, on accepte de se fondre dans une seule communauté, qui est la communauté nationale ;* » <http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/01012400567-islam-le-trouble-jeu-de-nicolas-sarkozy>

<sup>21</sup> Je proposerai d'inscrire les principes fondamentaux de la loi de 1905 sur la laïcité dans la Constitution en insérant, à l'article 1er, un deuxième alinéa ainsi rédigé : « La République assure la liberté de conscience, garantit le libre exercice des cultes et respecte la séparation des Églises et de l'État,(40) <http://fh2012.francoishollande.fr/les-60-engagements-du-projet/>



“I shall give the right to vote in local elections to foreigners legally living in France since five years. I shall lead a merciless struggle against illegal immigration and the clandestine work networks. I shall secure the lawful immigration.”<sup>22</sup>

On the opposite end of the political spectrum, the *Front National* (National Front) extreme right political party continues to capitalize on the anti-Muslim trend. When this party strongly emerged in the early 1980s, it immediately settled on the immigration question and tried to manipulate the disappointment and alienation felt by many French toward the political class by designing a scapegoat (“*bouc émissaire*”): the foreigners Arab, African and Muslim. The party was also strongly anti-Semitic due to its old roots. More recently, under Marine Le Pen’s leadership (the party’s founder’s daughter) the *Front National* slowly lost its anti-Semitic habits to concentrate on the Muslim and immigration issues. From 2010, Mrs. Le Pen adopted a very anti-Muslim position which will find an echo in the classical Right. For example, during the 2012 presidential campaign she exploited a controversy over the question of ritual *halal* meat in the French slaughterhouses.

### **How to Deal with Political Islam Abroad?**

When the Tunisian revolution began, the French Tunisian community was extremely taken by the events. Many Tunisian political refugees lived in France, and some French Tunisians feared for their families. But the hate against Ben Ali and his acolytes was significant. Young business leaders working in France—most of them holding two nationalities—engaged with the media to defend the Tunisian people. Most of the Tunisian community did not understand the French government’s silence during the revolution. When the boats full of Tunisian refugees came into Europe through the Italian island of Lampedusa (approximately 20,000)—most of them seeking to reach France but blocked by the French government—the outrage broke out. The French position was considered insufferable by the Tunisian public and by the French Tunisian community, which expressed it through public manifestations and blog bashing.

In Morocco, the diaspora community anxiously followed the riots appearing in many cities (Oujda, Tangiers, etc.) But the capacity of the *Mabzen* (the King's administration) to control the situation re-oriented the expectations of the public opinion and the diaspora community (MRE, *Marocains résidents à l'étranger*) toward a rapid constitutional change. Then the diaspora largely approved the reform process when King Mohammed VI proposed a new constitution. The referendum of the first of July 2011 gave a 98 percent approval for a semi-constitutional monarchy.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> J'accorderai le droit de vote aux élections locales aux étrangers résidant légalement en France depuis cinq ans. Je conduirai une lutte implacable contre l'immigration illégale et les filières du travail clandestin. Je sécuriserai l'immigration légale. (50) <http://fh2012.francoishollande.fr/les-60-engagements-du-projet>

<sup>23</sup> Number of vote from Moroccans outside; 269646 Bulletins nuls: 2494; Voix exprimées: 267152, Agence Maghreb Arabe Presse - 2011, Le Conseil constitutionnel annonce officiellement du projet de Constitution, <http://www.map.ma/mapfr/resultats-fr.pdf>

## The “Arab Spring”: France Face to the “Dark Scenario”

The events of September 11, 2001 increased the anxiousness of the French government and population toward Islamism. From this date, the struggle against terrorism tended to structure relations between France and the Maghreb as it did those between the United States and the Arab world. Consequently, this situation reinforced the positive bias, *prejudge*, for dictatorship seen as the wall against Jihadism and al Qaeda.

The rapid spread of the Arab Spring left European chancelleries disoriented. When the revolution occurred in Tunisia in mid-December 2010, the French government was incapable to respond to the event, letting the United-States support the insurrection and pressure for the fall of the dictator.

The downfall of Ben Ali and Mubarak completely shocked the French establishment. French authorities considered the fall of the old dictators impossible. Consequently, the government mixed a careful silence (until the ultimate flight of Ben Ali) and personal mistakes from various ministries (for example Foreign Minister Michelle Alliot-Marie going on holidays during the Tunisian riots with a private jet offered by a close relative of the Ben Ali family and buying a luxury flat for the minister’s parents, as well as the Minister of Culture Frédéric Mitterrand, assuring that Tunisia was not absolutely a dictatorship).<sup>24</sup> These mistakes were disastrously interpreted by the Tunisian community in France.

Finally, President Sarkozy decided to revamp his image within Arab public opinion. When the Libya upheaval occurred he advocated, on the suggestion of the French activist/philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy, military support of the Benghazi rebels. The choice was wise. From 1945 on, Libya never was a stake for France. The 1970s honeymoon engaged by the Pompidou presidency and essentially marked by huge military deals was rapidly followed by the war for Chad. This unnamed war ended with the defeat of Libyan forces in the mid-1980s. Then the situation remained frozen until the Libyans renounced the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in 2003. The attempt to create a special relationship between Sarkozy and Gaddafi failed with the Libyan dictator's unsuccessful visit to Paris in December 2007. The French government considered engaging militarily Gaddafi’s forces, a low political and geostrategic risk. The support of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, as well as the Arab League, made the military intervention possible despite the opposition of countries such as Algeria and Syria.

Once the Libyan war ended, the French doctrine *via-a-vis* the Arab Spring was officially to accept the change it entailed and to recognize the result of the polls whatever they might be.

President Sarkozy’s last declaration, by former Ministry of Foreign Affairs Alain Juppé, and the Spokesperson of the Ministry, were very clear. The general message was to accept all results coming

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<sup>24</sup> “There is a political opposition which speaks not absolutely as we do in Europe. But to affirm that Tunisia is an one voice dictature, as said so often, seems to me exaggerated.” [http://archives-lepost.huffingtonpost.fr/article/2011/01/10/2366147\\_frederic-mitterrand-dire-que-la-tunisie-est-une-dictature-univoque-me-semble-exagere.html](http://archives-lepost.huffingtonpost.fr/article/2011/01/10/2366147_frederic-mitterrand-dire-que-la-tunisie-est-une-dictature-univoque-me-semble-exagere.html)

from fair and reliable elections. The second was to assume to have been surprised by the upheavals but no more than others countries (an excuse not really acceptable from a government disposing all means of analysis and intelligence!).

*President Sarkozy:* “We have been criticized too regarding the Arab spring. Did we take too much time to understand what was happening, notably in Tunisia? Surely. Did we underestimate the exasperation of peoples against these authoritarian regimes and moreover their deep desire for freedom and democracy? Yes, I think so. At last, in name of stability, did we become too complacent vis-à-vis these oppressive and corrupt regimes? Absolutely!

But it would be honest to say this Arab spring surprised everybody and first those who did it. I add that in the Tunisian case, the ancient colonial power which is France was in very special position which exposed it more than others to a trial for interference. But, once more, France was capable to engage this great event for freedom which crossed over the Arab world, by proposing to accompany the development of democracy and economy in the framework of the Deauville Partnership, adopted by the G8 Summit under the French Presidency.<sup>25</sup>

*Alain Juppé:* “Everybody knows that history could reserve deceptions or surprises. And we are all determined to be vigilant in order to make the new governments capable to stay reliable to values on the basis of which they have been elected and respect the rules of democratic life. But I don’t see on which reasons we could refuse these people so many times gagged the right to express their choices. Regarding what happened in many countries, India, Latin America or Europe I do not see the reasons which will forbid not to be copied in Arab countries.”<sup>26</sup>

“The Arab spring is an incredible stake for the future. As in every gamble, it produces incertitude and risks.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> » On nous a aussi critiqués à propos des «printemps arabes». Avons-nous mis trop de temps à prendre la mesure de ce qui se passait, notamment en Tunisie ? Sûrement. Avons-nous sous-estimé l'exaspération de ces peuples contre ces régimes autoritaires et, surtout, leur profond désir de liberté et de démocratie ? Oui, je le crois. Enfin, au nom de la stabilité, avons-nous fait preuve de trop de complaisance vis-à-vis de ces régimes oppressifs et corrompus ? Sans doute. Mais il faut avoir l'honnêteté de dire que ces printemps arabes ont surpris tout le monde, à commencer par ceux qui les ont faits. J'ajoute que, dans le cas tunisien, l'ancienne puissance coloniale qu'est la France se trouvait dans une position particulière, qui l'exposait plus que d'autres à un procès en ingérence. Mais, une fois de plus, la France a su prendre la mesure de ce grand mouvement en faveur de la liberté qui a balayé le monde arabe, en proposant d'accompagner le développement de la démocratie et de l'économie de ces pays dans le cadre du Partenariat de Deauville adopté lors du Sommet du G8 sous Présidence française ». 36/341 05/02/2012 - Paris - Interview, [Entretien du président de la République, Nicolas Sarkozy, avec la revue "Politique Internationale" : extraits.](#)

<sup>26</sup> Le «printemps arabe» est un formidable pari sur l'avenir. Comme tous les paris, il comporte des incertitudes et des risques. 62/341 15/12/2011 - Tripoli - Discours, Déplacement en Libye : intervention du ministre d'Etat, ministre des Affaires étrangères et européennes, Alain Juppé, à l'université de Tripoli.

<sup>27</sup> Juppé : « Nous savons tous que l'histoire peut réserver des déceptions ou des surprises. Et nous sommes tous déterminés à faire preuve de vigilance pour que les nouveaux gouvernements restent fidèles aux valeurs pour lesquelles ils ont été élus et respectent les règles de la vie démocratique. Mais je ne vois pas au nom de

*Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson:* “The Minister of State will recall the essential role of United Nations to support all solutions to respond to people’s hope for freedom, respect of Human Rights and democracy. Moreover, he will recall our engagement without restrictions in these movements, which are both legitimate and irrepressible, and will strive to convince all our partners to act this way.”<sup>28</sup>

*Journalist regarding Egypt:* “Have you some contacts with official people or activists?”

*Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson:* “With everybody. Many criticize the French Diplomacy as others because at the beginning of the Arab Springs we only spoke with some people. M. Alain Juppé gave an instruction: we must speak with everybody. Our embassies do it in each country in the Arab world and more especially in Egypt.”<sup>29</sup>

### *Action and Repentance: the Last French Strategy*

The Syrian upheaval is an important development. When the first protests took place in Derah, the French government remained extremely cautious. Syria was not Libya and the destabilization of this country would bring strategic consequences to the neighborhood (Lebanon and Israël first). And the links with Iran would imply an overall tension throughout the Middle East. But rapidly the dramatic and uncontrolled repression of the Syrian government forced the international community to strongly react. France chose the most-anti-Al-Assad position, suggesting the Syrian President leave and supporting the *Transition Syrian Council* (organism representing every stream of the Syrian opposition). At the international level, France strongly supported a group of 70 nations named the international conference of Friends of Syria (simplified by “the Friends of Syria”) including countries such as United States, Canada, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Morocco. The group is very active, pushing for a democratic transition after the departure of the Baath/Alaoui power from Syria. Later France supported the Kofi Annan mission to Syria but without real expectations for success. Moreover, for the first time, France has evoked the use of force under the chapter VII of

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quoi nous pourrions refuser à des peuples dont la voix a été si longtemps étouffée le droit d’exprimer leur choix. Je ne vois pas au nom de quoi ce qui s’est passé dans tant de pays, en Inde, en Amérique latine ou en Europe, ne pourrait pas se produire dans les pays arabes. » 40/341 01/02/2012 - Paris - Discours Intervention du ministre d’Etat, ministre des Affaires étrangères et européennes, Alain Juppé, à l’Institut d’Etudes politiques de Paris.

<sup>28</sup> « Le ministre d’Etat rappellera le rôle essentiel des Nations unies pour soutenir toutes solutions visant à répondre aux aspirations des peuples à la liberté, au respect des droits de l’Homme et à la démocratie. Au-delà, il rappellera notre engagement sans nuance aux côtés de ces mouvements, aussi légitimes qu’irrépressibles et s’efforcera de convaincre l’ensemble de nos partenaires de la nécessité d’agir en ce sens. » 09/03/2012 - Paris - Point de presse Réunion du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies lundi prochain sur les Printemps arabes.

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.marianne2.fr/Sarkozy-et-l-Islam-Cesar-veut-se-meler-des-affaires-de-Dieu\\_a202906.html](http://www.marianne2.fr/Sarkozy-et-l-Islam-Cesar-veut-se-meler-des-affaires-de-Dieu_a202906.html)

Vous avez des contacts avec les officiels ou avec les activistes ? R - Avec tout le monde. On nous a beaucoup fait le reproche, à la diplomatie française comme à d’autres, au début des «Printemps arabes» de n’avoir parlé qu’avec certains. M. Alain Juppé a donné une instruction: nous devons parler à tous. C’est ce que font nos ambassades dans tous les pays du monde, dans le monde arabe en particulier et en Égypte encore plus particulièrement, 77/341 22/11/2011 - Paris - Point de presse Égypte. Diplomatie.gouv.fr

the UN Charter in case of failure by Annan's mission and the continuation of the repression through military means in Syria.<sup>30</sup> France seems determined to accept the victory of the Sunni community when the country will be free from Al-Assad's family, but the French government is anxious about the spread of the Syrian crisis to Lebanon as the recent confrontation between communities in Tripoli and now Beyrouth demonstrated.

France too is concerned about the security of Jordan. More discreetly than in other Arab countries, the kingdom is faced with huge economic and political problems. Despite the change of Prime Ministers, King Abdallah did not succeed in stabilizing the country. France, Great Britain and United States are closely following the situation, as they believe the fall of the Jordanian monarchy would be catastrophic for the strategic balance of the region.

Overall, it will be interesting to follow the relation between France and the old Arab monarchies. In the Gulf, France has two main allies (Qatar and United Arab Emirates). In the Near-East, France discreetly supports the Jordan monarchy and in the Maghreb, of course, Paris maintains traditional close links with the Moroccan palace (*Mahzen*). But the Arab monarchies are not exempt from protests. King Mohamed VI made the reforms necessary to calm the situation in Morocco, yet it is unclear if they will be sufficient in the long term. In other countries, despite a strong and close social control the situation is also potentially problematic. Saudi Arabia now in a dynasty crisis tries to modestly open the democracy process (including women). But we have no capability to forecast these countries capabilities of resistance to change. If the most police-controlled state in the Arab world (Tunisia) succeeded to dismiss its dictator, every regime may be in danger.

Who are the new interlocutors? The official dialogue with Islamist leaders was blocked for many years. Traditionally France spoke discretely with "classical" opponents representing the western model (socialist, liberal, human rightist, and others), individuals and groups generally reflecting, the same values and objectives of France. Yet, these persons gave a false vision of the political situation in their own country, as the evolution in Tunisia and Egypt demonstrated.

Nevertheless, French diplomacy has the capability to adapt and the Islamists interlocutors are quite well known. Most of the Islamists who are now surfacing in government positions have been in the political arena for years. Some suffered many years of jail, exile, ostracism by the former governments or official elites. The leaders of Ennhada, Muslim Brotherhood, PJD and other Islamist groups are still in charge. Even if the French government refused the dialogue—particularly in Tunisia—researchers specialized on Islamist movements and, hopefully, members of intelligence service continued to dialogue with them. Moreover, French diplomacy offers a strong capability to open the channels of discussion. Of course it will take time to build trust-based relations with these interlocutors.

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<sup>30</sup><http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr; Conférence de presse conjointe d'Alain Juppé avec des représentantes de l'opposition syrienne 25 avril 2012>

It seems that the new French Presidency and the new government will continue this approach. In the complicated landscape pre- and post- revolutions (Egypt being a good example), the difficulty will be to identify the reliable and confident leaders emerging and help them. Between Salafism and a risk of Islamist dictatorship, the way will be narrow to navigate “*l’oiseau rare*”—the rare bird! Because on the other side of the spectrum from Salafism and Jihadism (on the al Qaeda model) will remain the anti-model of Islamist democratic parties. The AKP Turkish model—celebrated in all Arab countries—challenged by other movements which refuse even the concept of elections and polls, advocating armed struggle. Ultimately, the western world and especially France—due to its historical and political position and its huge Muslim (including Arab and Berbers) community—have a responsibility to help the Arab Spring to in the modern wave of democracy and progress.

### **Inventing a new policy?**

Islamist parties may well take power in most Arab countries in the next years (except in Algeria for the moment). This wave requires France to define new relations with its Mediterranean neighborhood. The next French governments must create new links and identify the future Islamist elites. This presupposes accepting some behavior different from a western way of life. In the near future, the Arab societies will not reflect the France’s style, fashion or perceptions. This evolution will be driven by diplomatic issues. It also seems clear that the relationship with Israel should not be the same as well in bilateral relations for Arab States as in multilateral. That is to say that France and Europe will have many difficulties in maintaining an inclusive cooperative process such as the Union for the Mediterranean or any Euro-Mediterranean process including Israel inside.<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, the growing weight of French-born Muslims will influence the relation between France and the other Mediterranean countries. Regarding the Arab uprising, the Muslim/Arab

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<sup>31</sup> The Popular Assembly of Egypt claims for the expulsion of Israel Ambassador and to cease all gas export toward this country; <http://www.maghrebemergent.com/actualite/fil-maghreb/9899-egypte-le-parlement-appelle-a-lexpulsion-de-lambassadeur-disrael-au-caire.html>;

« The spokesperson of the Tunisian presidency denounces « the hostile nature of the *Sionist entity*».

"<http://www.jawharafm.net/news/16266--marzouki-denonce-qla-nature-hostile-de-lentite-sionisteq.html>.

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community in France could play a more important political role in the relation with their countries of origin and, maybe, in the defense of Muslim values. The largest community, the Algerian, is a huge link between both countries. It could play an important role in influencing the bilateral relationship. Of course, the importance of the countries of origin still exists, but a new, more independent force is being born, giving rise to two possible scenarios: the emergence of a coherent French national Muslim identity or fragmentation into ineffective competing groups. In either case, the influence of Muslims in French politics will grow.

The French government has a strong interest in seeing the new governments now being formed in the Middle East and North Africa succeed. Today, the Islamists in charge in many countries seek to emulate the AKP Party in Turkey. They have very conservative social views but espouse liberal economic positions and seek commercial exchanges and integration in the European system. Their own people are expecting dignity, growth and welfare. The last year was economically disastrous for countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. It was also a bad year for Morocco and Jordan. The immediate future does not look much better for these countries. The challenge for France, and for Western countries overall is to help the new governments succeed, despite their political colors. In case of failure, the situation could escalate into civil war and favor the rise of a more dangerous extremism. It is a dramatic challenge.

# Spain and Islamist Movements: from the Victory of the FIS to the Arab Spring<sup>1</sup>

By Ana I. Planet  
and Miguel Hernando de Larramendi

Although concerns about political Islam in the western world can be traced back to the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, Spain's need to articulate a position was delayed until the end of the 1980s, coinciding with the reactivation of foreign policy towards the Mediterranean after decades of international isolation. After Spain's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1986, its diplomatic goal became making the Mediterranean an area of influence that would allow the Iberian nation to buttress its status as a middle power.

Since 1995, Spain has led a renewal in Euro-Mediterranean relations. By Europeanizing its agenda towards the Mediterranean, Spain sought to channel European resources to a region that is vital for its security interests. The philosophy that inspired the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership launched in Barcelona that year held that it was not sufficient to maintain trade relations alone, but rather that relations with the southern Mediterranean needed to include political, social and cultural elements, following the model of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). This new framework emphasized the importance of civil society participating in the Euro-Mediterranean process. However, the democratization and human rights objectives were merely rhetorical and in practice remained subordinate to an economic agenda. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, economic affairs gave way to security concerns, and civil society had no active role to play in what were basically intergovernmental relations.<sup>2</sup>

Political Islamism first posed a challenge to Spanish foreign policy at the end of the 1980s. The dynamics of political liberalization initiated by Arab regimes to counteract their legitimacy deficit placed the question of whether Islamist movements should be integrated into the politics at the

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<sup>1</sup> The research for this article was conducted under the auspices of the R&D&I projects “Nuevos espacios, actores e instrumentos en las relaciones exteriores de España con el mundo árabe y musulmán” (CSO2011-29438-C05-02) and “El mundo árabe-islámico en Movimiento: Migraciones, reformas y elecciones. Su impacto en España,” CSO2011-29438-C05-01.

<sup>2</sup> As part of Europe's Mediterranean policy, civil forums have been held concurrently with successive Euro-Mediterranean conferences and, beginning in 2005, institutions like the *Anna Lindb Euro-Mediterranean Foundation* for the Dialogue between Cultures have been formed to promote the creation of national networks made up of representatives from civil society. However, the opportunities created before the Arab Spring were not open to all, but rather suffered from a lack of representatives from Islamist movements. See Isaías Barreñada and Iván Martín: “La sociedad civil y la Asociación Euromediterránea: de la retórica a la práctica”, *Papeles de Cuestiones Internacionales*, No. 92, Winter 2005-2006, pp. 79-89. ECHART MUÑOZ, Enara: *Movimientos sociales y relaciones internacionales. La irrupción de un nuevo actor*. IUDC/Los Libros de la Catarata, Madrid, 2008, pp. 215-282.



center of these processes.<sup>3</sup> The legalization of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria in 1989, as part of the process of political openness championed by President Chadli Bendjedid, presented a significant predicament for Spanish foreign policy in the Maghreb. This is a region where—due to both geographic proximity and historical relationships—Spanish interests in the Arab world are concentrated.

The question of integrating Islamist movements into politics in Arab countries entered a new phase in 2001. After the 9/11 attacks, the George W. Bush administration defended the need to promote democratization in the Arab world, believing that the continued existence of authoritarian regimes created favourable conditions for jihadist terrorism. The military intervention in Iraq in 2003 was justified, *a posteriori*, as an instrument to foster a democratization process that would reach the other Arab states by osmosis. In this context, the integration of Islamist parties—the main opposition forces—constituted a challenge for Arab regimes with close ties to the United States. Their status as allies in the American “War on Terror” allowed the regimes to decrease the pressure put on them, claiming that democratization could not be imposed from outside, but had to be the result of processes of change taking place inside each state. However, the dynamics of change had already begun in the region. During the last decade, Islamist movements won seats in legislative elections held in Algeria (2002 and 2007), Morocco (2002 and 2007), Jordan (2002 and 2007), Egypt (2005) and Lebanon (2000 and 2005), and claimed victory in Palestine (2006). This was the second electoral victory for an Islamist movement and thus represented a second challenge to the foreign policy of Spain and the rest of the European Union.

### **The Spanish position on Islamist movements**

Spanish governments, regardless of their political stripe, have not formulated a defined strategy in the last two decades with which to address either relations or dialogue with Islamist movements. The Spanish policy toward these movements, which during this time have established themselves as important actors in opposing the authoritarian regimes in the region, has been fundamentally reactive. Islamist movements have not been perceived as agents of democratization, but as a threat to stability. Consequently, they have not been included in a bilateral program to promote democracy and strengthen civil society financed by the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (Bustos 2007). Neither have they been included in international visitor programmes organized by Spanish public institutions like the Fundación Carolina, which has given priority to exchanges with Latin America.

Spanish politicians have often used the positions adopted within the framework of the European Union as cover and have subordinated any movement or proposal to a higher objective: preserving relations with political regimes perceived as guarantors of regional stability. Thus, the Spanish position has been conditioned largely by the status and recognition that different Islamist movements have had in each of the Arab and Muslim states. Thus, they have been determined on a

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<sup>3</sup> Bernabé López, Gema Martín and Miguel H. Larramendi, *Elecciones, Participación y Transiciones Políticas en el Norte de África*, Instituto de Cooperación con el Mundo Árabe, Madrid 1991.

case-by-case basis. After the terrorist attacks of March 11, 2004 in Madrid, an internal security dimension was introduced in the Spanish position. Although a distinction was established between Islamist movements and international terrorism at that time, after the attacks, concerns about the radicalization of young Muslims in Spain intensified, leading to the creation of new instruments for dialogue and diplomatic initiatives.<sup>4</sup>

### **Spain and Islamist Movements in the Maghreb**

News of the legalization and subsequent victory of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in the municipal Algerian elections in June 1990 was received with concern in Spain. The country regarded the situation as a risk that could jeopardize the stability of the western Mediterranean, destabilizing the other Maghreb countries, especially Morocco, which is separated from the Iberian Peninsula by only 14 kilometres<sup>5</sup>. Spanish apprehension about an eventual FIS victory in the legislative elections, planned for December 1991, was focused on the implications for petroleum and natural gas supplies to Spain if an Islamist party came into power (Abid 2001). Spanish diplomacy, thus, sought guarantees that international treaties and agreements would be respected. In 1990, Jorge Dezcallar, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General for North Africa and the Middle East, went to Algeria where he met with Abbassi Madani, one of the FIS leaders, who reassured the Spanish diplomat, asserting that “energy is the blood that runs through the veins of Algeria” (López and Hernando de Larramendi 2011: p. 264).

For Spanish politicians and analysts, the rise of political Islamism was considered a consequence of the economic, social and political crisis that shook the region and turned it into a “time bomb” (Gillespie 2000: pp. 148-149, 165). The stabilization of the region, in the Spanish view, lay in encouraging development and improving living conditions for the population.<sup>6</sup> This commitment to socio-political stability in defending Spanish interests gave rise to a realistic position that would preserve the status quo in the region, represented by authoritarian leaders in the Maghreb. The Spanish position was conceptualized as endorsing a “dynamic stability” and emphasized the conviction of “supporting democratic changes as long as they do not interfere with Spain’s strategic interests.”<sup>7</sup> Following this line, in January 1992, the Spanish government refrained from condemning

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<sup>4</sup> See the analyses of Juan José Escobar, one of the Spanish diplomats who has accomplished the most to draw attention to Islamist movements (Escobar 2004, 2006 and 2007, among others).

<sup>5</sup> Minister for Foreign Affairs Francisco Fernández Ordoñez noted that the election result was bad news, while a statement by defense minister Narcis Serra suggested immediate concern about security implications: “Spain has always maintained that NATO must concern itself with the south to give stability to the Mediterranean,” quoted by Gillespie 2000: 101.

<sup>6</sup> Jorge Dezcallar concluded an article on “El Fundamentalismo islámico en el mundo árabe: las razones de su éxito [Islamic Fundamentalism in the Arab World: the Reasons for its Success]” published in the journal *Política Exterior* in 1991 by affirming that “the more political participation —read democracy—there is and the more economic development there is—and here our assistance is essential—the fewer the temptations (so common today) to find solutions there for problems here”. See Jorge Dezcallar, *Textos sobre cuestiones conflictivas de África y Oriente Medio*, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Madrid, 1993, p. 140.

<sup>7</sup> Bernabé López and Miguel Hernando de Larramendi (2002), “Spain and North Africa Towards a Dynamic Stability,” *Democratization*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 170-191.

the coup d'état in Algeria that brought an end to the electoral process and unleashed a gruelling civil conflict, lasting for almost a decade<sup>8</sup>. During this period, the Spanish government maintained a low profile, shielding itself behind the positions established by the European Economic Community under the leadership of France, the former colonial power in Algeria.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Spanish government supported the right of the Algerian regime to combat Islamist terrorism, it tried to balance this position with appeals to the respect for human rights and dialogue with “all the political forces that wanted stability, including the more moderate of the groups that had defended the Islamist rebellion” (Gillespie 2000: p.105).

It would seem that the priority given to relations with the Arab regimes limited the establishment of contacts with Islamist movements that were illegal or the object of political persecution. In Tunisia's case, the Spanish government granted political asylum to some leaders of the al-Nahda party when repression of the movement intensified at the beginning of the 1990s, but declined to condemn these practices officially. In March 1995, the Spanish authorities succumbed to pressure from Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's regime and expelled the party's leader, Rachid Ghannouchi, from the country. Ghannouchi was preparing to participate in a conference in Cordoba on the relationship between Islam and modernity organized by the Universidad Islámica Internacional Averroes de Al-Andalus (UIIA)<sup>10</sup>. Years later, the link between al-Nahda and the al Qaeda terrorist organisation, which the Tunisian authorities alleged after the 9/11 attacks, was one of the arguments the Spanish legal authorities invoked in 2005 to withdraw the political asylum status of Ridha Barouni, a leader of the al-Nahda party and former president of the Centro Islámico de Valencia.<sup>11</sup>

In Morocco, the integration of the branch of Islamism that did not question the role of the king as Amir al-Muminin, or “commander of the faithful,” into national politics created the right conditions to establish contact with Islamist leaders who, in 1996, were incorporated into the Constitutional and Democratic Popular Movement (MPDC), later the Justice and Development Party (PJD).<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>8</sup> Minister for Foreign Affairs Francisco Fernández Ordoñez justified the coup d'état, saying that it was about “avoiding a certain evil” since “some Algerian political forces had announced their anti-democratic intentions”. *El País* 18/02/1992

<sup>9</sup> This position was questioned by some Spanish diplomats like Gabriel Mañueco who argued that the Spanish position should not follow the French one since the internal security challenges presented by the crisis for France were not the same as in Spain. Gabriel Mañueco “España ante la crisis argelina” *Política Exterior*, Vol. 6, No. 27, pp. 116-128

<sup>10</sup>[http://www.cidob.org/es/documentacion/biografias\\_lideres\\_politicos/africa/tunez/rashid\\_ghannouchi](http://www.cidob.org/es/documentacion/biografias_lideres_politicos/africa/tunez/rashid_ghannouchi)  
This did not occur in the case of the Sudanese Hassan al-Turabi. This leader of the National Islamic Front and ideologue for the military regime established by General Omar al-Bashir came to Spain in August 1994 to participate in a summer course organised by the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. “El islamismo barrerá el norte de África”, *El País* 02/08/1994.

<sup>11</sup> “La oposición tunecina pide a Zapatero que dé asilo a El Barouni”, *Levante*, 1/7/2005 available at <http://www.levante-emv.com/comunitat-valenciana/2837/oposicion-tunecina-pide-zapatero-asilo-barouni/119525.html>

<sup>12</sup> Eva Wegner, *Islamist Opposition in Authoritarian Regimes. The Party of Justice and Development in Morocco*, Syracuse University Press, 2011.

first contacts were made by diplomats based in the Spanish Embassy in Rabat. The incorporation of Islamist deputies in the Moroccan parliament after the September 1997 legislative elections facilitated the development of contacts both at institutional and civil society levels.<sup>13</sup> The first institutional contact with Spanish political parties was the initiative of the PJD which, after the 2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca, tried to break the links between political Islamism and terrorism that had been invoked by part of the Moroccan political class as a reason for its illegalization. In the face of silence from European and Spanish diplomats, the PJD put together a communication strategy designed to establish ties with political, social and economic actors in Europe and strengthen its image as a political party with democratic credentials.<sup>14</sup> As part of a true communication campaign, a delegation from the PJD visited several European countries, including Spain. In April 2005, a delegation headed by the Secretary General of the party, Saadeddine Othmani, went to Madrid. It was received by the President of the Spanish parliament and held meetings with representatives of the three main Spanish political parties (the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party, the People's Party and the United Left)<sup>15</sup> along with leaders of the Association of Moroccan Immigrant Workers in Spain (ATIME) and the Spanish Confederation of Business Organisations (CEOE)<sup>16</sup>. The PJD delegation also participated in a ceremony in memory of the victims of the March 11, 2004 terrorist attacks.

Two years later, Saadeddine Othmani visited Spain again, a few months before the September 2007 legislative elections. On that occasion, he was invited on par with other Moroccan political parties (the Istiqlal Party and the Socialist Union of Popular Forces) to introduce his group's economic program.<sup>17</sup> The invitation was issued by the Arab House, a public diplomatic institution under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation in collaboration with the Spanish section of the Averroes Committee—a joint Spanish-Moroccan committee created by both countries to promote better mutual understanding<sup>18</sup>—and by the National University of Distance Education (UNED), with the participation of Spanish businesspeople.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Some party leaders like Amin Bujubza—a councillor on the Tetouan city council—participated in academic seminars like the one organized in July 1998 by the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid's Taller de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos (TEIM) on *Marruecos 1998, un nuevo rumbo. Economía, sociedad, cultura y política*. Researchers at this center have held periodic meetings with party leaders in Rabat since then.

<sup>14</sup> Amel Boubekeur and Samir Amghar, "Islamist Parties in the Maghreb and their links with E.U: Mutual Influences and the Dynamics of Democratisation," *Euromesco Paper*, No. 55, (2006).

<sup>15</sup> Irene Fernández Molina "Le PJD et la politique étrangère de Maroc. Entre l'idéologie et le pragmatisme" *Documentos Cidob*. Serie Mediterráneo No. 7, (2007), pp. 72-74.

<sup>16</sup> Saadeddine Elotmani also spoke at a conference hosted by FRIDE, a Spanish think tank. The transcript can be read at: <http://www.fride.org/evento/82/seminario-con-representantes-del-partido-de-la-justicia-y-el-desarrollo-de-marruecos>

<sup>17</sup> *ABC* 25/08/2007. The video of this conference can be found at: <http://www.casaarabe.es/mediateca/show/215>

<sup>18</sup> Bernabé López García "La sociedad civil y las relaciones con Marruecos: el comité Averroes. ¿un instrumento para el acercamiento entre las sociedades o la retórica de la mediación civil?" in Miguel Hernando de Larramendi and Aurelia Mañé (eds.), *La política exterior española hacia el Magreb. Actores e intereses*, Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid 2009, pp. 195-207.

<sup>19</sup>[http://www.casaarabe.es/uploads/html/Alertas/alerta\\_02/0707ConferOthmani-Alerta2.pdf](http://www.casaarabe.es/uploads/html/Alertas/alerta_02/0707ConferOthmani-Alerta2.pdf)

Conversely, in this same Moroccan context, the extra-legal nature of al-Adl wa al-Ihssane (Justice and Charity)—at times tolerated and other times violently repressed—has influenced Spanish attitudes towards the movement, which refuses to engage in the political game in Morocco and questions the role of the monarchy in the system. Contacts with Nadia Yassine, the daughter of the founder of the Justice and Charity movement, Abdesslam Yassine, and leader of the party's women's wing, go back to the late the 1990s. They were initiated in a discreet fashion by Spanish diplomats working in the embassy in Rabat. Since 2003, when she recovered her passport, Nadia Yassine has visited Spain and other European countries, developing a “transnational opposition mode” that has brought outside attention to the organization (Boubekeur and Amghar 2006: 15). Nadia Yassine's visits generally take place in an academic context that allows her to participate in university exchanges focusing on questions related to Islam and Islamic feminism.<sup>20</sup> The contacts she established with an active group of Spanish Muslims, the Junta Islámica de España, led this organization to call for legalizing the Justice and Charity Movement in Morocco in May 2006.<sup>21</sup> However, because of the movement's illegal status in Morocco, establishing institutional contacts with the Spanish authorities, who are concerned about creating friction with the authorities in Rabat, has been limited. Pressure from the Moroccan Embassy in Spain, for example, was successful in preventing the movement from participating in the “La Mar de Músicas” festival, organized by the Cartagena City Council on the Mediterranean coast, which dedicated its fifteenth festival in 2009 to Morocco.<sup>22</sup>

The trips taken by Nadia Yassine and other movement leaders like Mohamed Abbadí, a member of al-Adl wa al-Ihssane's higher council, are also used to maintain contact with the socio-cultural associations created by Moroccans living in Spain. The organizational platform of Justice and Charity created in Spain takes advantage of the presence of the nearly 800,000 Moroccan immigrants in the country alongside a group of associations joined together in the Organización Nacional para el Diálogo y la Participación (ONDA), which has a strong showing in the regions of Murcia, Andalusia and Madrid. Although this organization maintains close ties with al-Adl wa al-Ihssane, it has called for these ties with the Moroccan organization to be formally broken.<sup>23</sup> The Spanish legal system has argued that membership in the Moroccan organization should disqualify Spanish nationality to several organization members who applied for it after residing legally in the country for more than ten years.<sup>24</sup> Al-Adl wa al-Ihssane has become increasingly involved in Spanish religious matters, challenging attempts made by the Moroccan authorities to control this sphere. The clash between

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<sup>20</sup> In 2004, she participated in conferences in Madrid, Granada and San Sebastián. In October 2005, she attended the 1<sup>st</sup> Conference on Islamic Feminism held in Barcelona. In May 2006, she participated in a conference for the Cátedra Emilio García Gómez at the Universidad de Granada. In November 2008, she took part in a course organized by the Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo in Tenerife.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.webislam.com/noticias/46337->

[la-junta-islamica-de-espana-defiende-la-legalizacion-del-partido-islamista-marro.html](http://www.webislam.com/noticias/46337-la-junta-islamica-de-espana-defiende-la-legalizacion-del-partido-islamista-marro.html)

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.acsur.org/Las-organizaciones-sociales,671>

<sup>23</sup> Elena Arigita “Al-‘Adl wa-l-Ihsan en España: ¿Un proyecto nacional para un movimiento islámico transnacional?”, *Revista de Dialectología y Tradiciones Populares*, Vol. LXV, No. 1, pp. 113-136.

<sup>24</sup> *Al-Ayam*, May 21, 2007

the two sides has led to disputes over control of the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities (FEERI), one of the Muslim associations that is part of the Islamic Commission of Spain (CIE), the official mediator between the Spanish state and Muslims in the country.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Spanish position on Hamas and Hezbollah**

The true test for Spanish and European policies appeared when the Hamas Islamist movement won the legislative elections organized by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in January 2006. The degree to which Spanish foreign policy was independent in thought and action and its commitment to democratic processes were put to the test by an electoral process that, despite the results, could not be termed fraudulent and received the backing of international organizations like the Carter Foundation.

The Spanish position evolved from initial acceptance of the results<sup>26</sup> to alignment with the positions of the so-called Quartet (the United States, European Union, Russia and the UN), which conditioned recognition of Hamas on its accepting the agreements signed as part of the peace process, renouncing violence and recognizing the State of Israel.<sup>27</sup> The victory of Hamas—an organization that, it is important to remember, was included on the European Union’s list of terrorist organisations—was considered by the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs at the time, Miguel Angel Moratinos, as a direct attack against the peace process. But it did not stop there. The boycott of Hamas interfered with official aid for development in the Palestinian territories. Spain cut off relations with the ministries controlled by Hamas and took steps to ensure that any affected projects would henceforth be the concern of the office of President Mahmoud Abbas.

The Spanish position regarding Hezbollah has been different. Facing the boycott of Hamas, the Spanish government opted for a strategy of dialogue with the Hezbollah Islamist movement, which has given voice to part of the Shiite religious community in the Lebanese parliament since 1992. The Spanish government opposed including Hezbollah on the European Union’s list of terrorist organizations. It has also not hesitated to maintain direct contact with the movement’s leaders. During his tour of the Middle East in August 2007, Minister Moratinos met with Hezbollah’s number two leader, Naim Qassem.<sup>28</sup> Various factors explain Spain’s inclusive position toward Hezbollah (Tomé 2011:232-233). The fact that Hezbollah is not included on the EU’s list of terrorist

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<sup>25</sup> “Rabat pierde su principal instrumento de control de la inmigración marroquí,” *El País*, January 5, 2012

<sup>26</sup> Minister for Foreign Affairs Miguel Ángel Moratinos declared in a statement to the Spanish parliament that the “elections were free, with great participation, transparency and every democratic safeguard”, concluding that “the results must be respected”. *Boletín Oficial del Congreso de los Diputados* No. 147, August 2, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Ignacio Álvarez-Ossorio Alvariño “España ante el Gobierno de Hamas”, *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, No. 79-80, pp. 189-206

<sup>28</sup> This position was criticized by the Spanish People’s Party in the words of Gustavo de Aristegui, the spokesperson for parliament’s Foreign Affairs Commission, who called it “an immense mistake that is going to take its toll on the credibility of the EU as a whole and on Spain in particular.”

[http://www.webislam.com/noticias/49958-el\\_pp\\_critica\\_la\\_reunion\\_de\\_moratinos\\_con\\_un\\_dirigente\\_de\\_hezbollah.html](http://www.webislam.com/noticias/49958-el_pp_critica_la_reunion_de_moratinos_con_un_dirigente_de_hezbollah.html)

organizations makes it possible to argue that there is a need to speak with all the actors to justify dialogue with an organization which stresses its political and representative character. Maintaining dialogue also fulfils the need to ensure the security of the contingent of 1,100 Spanish soldiers in Lebanon since September 2006—Spanish troops that form part of the United National Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL II) are deployed in the southern part of the country in a Shiite majority region controlled by Hezbollah.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Relationship with Political Islam, a Marginal but Real Debate**

The issue of a relationship and dialogue with Islamist movements was not a subject of political debate in Spain until the 9/11 terrorist attacks. During the 1990s, the principal political parties' view was determined largely by the evolution of the Algerian civil conflict. During this period, the position of the Socialist Party (PSOE), which was in power between 1982 and 1996, and the People's Party, in power between 1996 and 2004, converged, both perceiving the emergence of Islamism as a source of risk and a threat. In 1992, the Cánovas del Castillo Foundation, which has ties to the People's Party, organized a seminar on "Islamic Fundamentalism" featuring the participation of future Prime Minister José María Aznar.<sup>30</sup> Years later, the electoral program that the People's Party ran and won on in 1996 stressed the course of "recommending that simplistic formulas of a generalized rejection of these movements be eschewed and imaginative channels for relationships and dialogue be found with its moderate manifestations."<sup>31</sup>

Spain's transformation into a country of immigration during those years and the acceptance of neoconservative thought, which argued a link between jihadist terrorism and Islam after the 9/11 attacks, by groups like the People's Party transformed the terms of the debate. The positions of the People's Party in this respect—although not monolithic—tended to be ideologized<sup>32</sup> (Fernández Molina 2009: pp.56-59). The Foundation for Social Studies and Analysis (FAES), a People's Party think tank created by Prime Minister Aznar, played an active role in accepting neoconservative ideas from the United States and maintaining positions that were critical of Islamism.<sup>33</sup> However, the People's Party contains other leaders like Gustavo de Aristegui, a diplomat and spokesman for the

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<sup>29</sup> Amaia Goenaga Sánchez "El compromiso español en Líbano: ¿un nuevo papel para España en Oriente Próximo?, *Revista Cidob d'Afers Internacionals*, No. 79-80, pp. 227-246.

<sup>30</sup> *El Fundamentalismo islámico*, Fundación Cánovas del Castillo, Madrid 1992.

<sup>31</sup> People's Party, *Con la nueva mayoría. Programa electoral*, Madrid 1996, p.. 235.

<sup>32</sup> In a text dealing with Spanish-Israeli relations, Florentino Portero, an analyst at the Strategic Studies Group (GEES), asserted that "the People's Party, from its experience in the fight against ETA, rejects any compromise with extremist groups and governments [...] Islamists do not arouse sympathy in our left, however anti-American they may be, and the concern that they arouse has not resulted in a firm position. Quite to the contrary, in the face of the threat posed by Iranian Ayatollahs or Palestinian Islamists, they defend the option of searching for new channels of understanding." "Las relaciones hispano-israelíes," *Araucaria Revista Iberoamericana de Filosofía, Política y Humanidades*, Year 10, No. 19, 2008, [http://institucional.us.es/araucaria/nro19/monogr19\\_6.htm](http://institucional.us.es/araucaria/nro19/monogr19_6.htm)

<sup>33</sup> The FAES dedicated one of the sessions in the course "The Tyranny of the Politically Correct" held in July 2008 to analyzing the threat of political Islamism.

[http://www.fundacionfaes.org/es/mesa\\_redonda\\_sobre\\_la\\_amenaza\\_del\\_islamismo\\_politico](http://www.fundacionfaes.org/es/mesa_redonda_sobre_la_amenaza_del_islamismo_politico)

Spanish parliament's Foreign Affairs Commission who is very knowledgeable about the Arab world. While establishing a link between ideology and terrorism (Aristegui 2000: p. 185), he has distanced himself from the thesis argued by some FAES researchers who speculate about "the impending establishment of a Caliphate in Europe" (Bardají 2006: p. 185). The branch of the People's Party represented by de Aristegui has maintained more nuanced positions. While presuming a more or less direct tie between Islamism, understood as a "totalitarian ideology," and terrorist acts, they have admitted that some forms of "political Islam," such as those represented by the Muslim Brotherhood, are not necessarily illegitimate (Aristegui 2003: p. 117).

For its part, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, while rejecting the ideologized positions of the neoconservatives, has not succeeded in elaborating a clear position regarding dialogue and political cooperation with moderate Islamist movements (as has been the case with a large part of the European left) (Mathieson and Youngs 2006: pp. 13,19). Thus, although some socialist representatives have suggested the advisability of "supporting forms of moderate Islamism that have important social support" (Aburto 2008: p.25), they have not taken any steps in this direction. The links established through the Socialist International Mediterranean Committee with parties from the same political family (the Algerian Socialist Forces Front and the Socialist Union of Popular Forces in Morocco), for example, have not helped to add nuance to the negative view of Islamist parties in general. Not included among them, however, is the Turkish Justice and Development Party (JDP), which is believed to share "broad similarities" and whose plan of action is seen as "progressive in many aspects" (Fernández Molina 2009: p.55).

### **Tools and Opportunities for Interaction with Political Islam**

The lack of any clear policy toward Islamist movements has not impeded contacts and opportunities for interaction and dialogue, which have intensified over the last decade. In this process, the March 11, 2004 terrorist attacks, resulting in 191 fatalities in Madrid, acted as a salutary lesson, leading the Spanish authorities to pay more attention to Islam, Islamism and jihadist terrorism. The subsequent trial showed that many Moroccan immigrants participated in the attacks and, thus, intensified concerns about radicalization processes among young Muslims and the role that transnational Muslim movements might be playing in this process.

The socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, which won the elections held three days after the attacks, pushed through a battery of diplomatic and institutional initiatives designed to change the course of Prime Minister Aznar's government, which had supported the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. In September 2004, Zapatero officially argued for the creation of an "Alliance of Civilisations" between the western world and the Arab-Muslim world before the General Assembly of the United Nations (Barreñada 2006:pp. 99-104). This diplomatic initiative, which was inspired by the earlier proposal by Iranian President Mohammad Khatami for a "Dialogue of Civilisations," was presented as a soft power tool with which to combat international terrorism. The initiative was approved by the United Nations in 2007, and supported by 107 states and 20 international



organizations.<sup>34</sup> Zapatero's government was able to get Turkey—a country whose candidacy to join the European Union has been supported by all Spanish governments, regardless of their political stripe—to co-sponsor the initiative. The endorsement of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan<sup>35</sup> and his Justice and Development Party (JDP), which while defined as a conservative democratic party in its statutes,<sup>36</sup> is seen in Europe as a moderate Islamist party (Cajal 2011), was intended to give greater credibility to the initiative. In an interview with CNN, Prime Minister Zapatero described it as a “grand alliance with moderate Islam to isolate violent members.”<sup>37</sup> In January 2008 in Madrid, the Spanish government hosted the first Forum for the Alliance of Civilisations and drafted two National Plans for the Alliance of Civilisations, designed to instill the initiative's principles in Spain.<sup>38</sup>

The U.N. Alliance of Civilizations, along with the U.K. based group Forward Thinking,<sup>39</sup> sponsored The Nyon Process,<sup>40</sup> launched in Switzerland in 2008 as a forum for informal direct dialogue with Muslim activists. With the support of Switzerland, Portugal, Spain and Turkey, this initiative has provided a platform for discreet dialogue between western political leaders, policy advisors and activists. The third meeting was held in Madrid in March 2009 and was hosted by the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Domestically, concerns about the eventual radicalization of Spanish Islam have not only led to the fortification of police and security resources allocated to monitor the issue, but have also resulted in other initiatives aimed at strengthening the public presence of Muslims through the development of their own cultural and social action programs. In October 2004, the Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence<sup>41</sup> was created. Part of the Ministry of Justice, the foundation's goals are to promote religious freedom through cooperation with minority religions, especially those that are specifically recognized by the Spanish state: Islam, Protestantism and Judaism. Although its purview is broader in scope, the foundation was originally founded as an international response to the March 11, 2004 terrorist attacks. The foundation offers subsidies to build up the bodies responsible for social dialogue within each of the religions that have cooperation agreements with the Spanish state. It also facilitates financing for cultural, educational and social integration projects proposed by religious associations. By following the foundation's subventions and its support for academic research, it has yielded a snapshot of Islam in Spain,<sup>42</sup> its organization and operation and the role played by movements like Tablighi Jamaat, in the case of Pakistan, and the Moroccan al-Adl wa al-Ihssane.

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.unaoc.org/>

<sup>35</sup> José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Recep Tayyip Erdogan “Forjando una alianza de civilizaciones”, *El País*, November 13, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> The JDP was included as an observer for the European People's Party.

<sup>37</sup> “Zapatero aboga por una 'gran alianza' con el islamismo moderado”, *El Mundo*. September 23, 2009.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.pnac.gob.es/>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.forwardthinking.org>

<sup>40</sup> [http://nyonprocess.org/?page\\_id=132](http://nyonprocess.org/?page_id=132)

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.pluralismoyconvivencia.es/>

<sup>42</sup> The Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence created the *Observatory for Religious Pluralism* in Spain <http://www.observatorioreligion.es/>

For its part, the Ministry of Justice Directorate General for Religious Affairs—currently “the committee on work with religious structures”—has been actively participating by creating networks and sharing experiences with ministries in other European countries responsible for dialogue with Muslim organizations in different countries. The concern about Islam and political Islamism in the Spanish administration is also reflected in the organization of specific educational courses on Islam aimed at civil servants. Organized since 2006 by the Spanish Diplomatic School, these courses have been co-sponsored with the Arab House since 2009, a public diplomatic institution formed in 2006 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. These courses look at the reality and evolution of Islam in its ideological and political aspects, inviting active members from Muslim associations as speakers. In 2010, for example, Rachid Boutarbuch, the president of the Spanish League of Imams and driving force behind the establishment of the al-Adl wa-l-Ihssane movement in Spain, was a participant.<sup>43</sup>

In 2004, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs created a working group under the auspices of its analysis and outlook cabinet that led to the publication of an internal report in March 2005 entitled “Islam and Politics in Europe.” In October 2006, an ambassador-at-large was appointed to handle relations with Muslim organizations and communities abroad for the first time.<sup>44</sup> Affiliated with the Directorate General of Political Affairs, Middle East and North Africa Division, this ambassador monitors and dialogues with Muslims in Europe and Arab countries with a very broad mandate (in contrast to the limited material resources set aside for the role). This ambassador has also participated in interfaith dialogue forums such as those advanced by Qatar and The Nyon Process. Spain also used interfaith dialogues during its presidency of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In that year, 2007, the city of Cordoba hosted an International Conference on Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, presented by the Spanish Chairmanship of the OSCE.

The Spanish government has also participated—though keeping a low profile—in other discreet and informal initiatives for dialogue with leaders of moderate Islamist movements promoted by independent mediation institutions and think tanks. Since 2010, Spanish diplomats have participated in meetings organized in Geneva by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. The level of Spanish engagement has been lower than that of other countries like Norway, Germany, France, Canada and Switzerland, who have been represented at these forums by Director Generals, while Spain’s representative is the ambassador-at-large for Mediterranean affairs.

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<sup>43</sup> [http://nyonprocess.org/?page\\_id=132](http://nyonprocess.org/?page_id=132)

<http://www.maec.es/es/MenuPpal/Ministerio/EscuelaDiplomatica/Cursosobrer+elacionesinternacionales/Documents/Programa%20Islam%202010.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> The position was filled by José María Ferré between 2006 and 2010, by Miguel Benzo between 2010 and 2011 and by Ignacio Rupérez since December 2011.

## Spain and Islamist Movements after the Arab Spring

The uprisings that began in Tunisia in December 2010 took Spanish diplomacy by surprise and called into question the paradigm of authoritarian stability on which Spanish and European policy toward the Mediterranean had rested (Echagué 2011). The need to respond to the unexpected disturbances that brought down the leaders of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen was complicated by a new dilemma related to the advances in the democratization processes underway by Islamist movements. Although the uprisings were not led by these movements and the demands that drove them were not associated with an Islamist ideology, Islamist parties secured a majority in the elections held in Tunisia (October 2011), Morocco (November 2011) and Egypt (November 2011 – March 2012).

In an article published in December 2011, the then Socialist Minister for Foreign Affairs Trinidad Jiménez argued that it was necessary to “give a vote of confidence to the new political forces when they proclaim their commitment to democracy.” For the minister, the uprisings ushered in “the end of Arab-Muslim particularism in terms of the supposed incompatibility between Islam and democracy and Islam and human rights.”<sup>45</sup> Bernardino León, General-Secretary of the Presidency of the Spanish Government between 2008 and 2011 and EU special envoy to the southern Mediterranean since 2011, argued a similar line. The Spanish diplomat stated that “democracy must not generate fear; it will always be the right choice,” at the same time defending how important it is for “Islamist parties to experience a government that is good and moderate.”<sup>46</sup> This reassuring viewpoint was also shared by former Minister for Foreign Affairs Moratinos, who emphasized that “moderate political Islamism should not be frightening [...] as long as it creates the right conditions to guarantee public freedom and the state of law.”<sup>47</sup>

When the People’s Party came into power in December 2011, it had not substantially changed its position. Moderate Islamist movements are accepted as political players in their capacity as actors in the transition process. Gonzalo de Benito, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, asserted that “political Islamism was being integrated naturally and reasonably into the power structures in transition countries,” but he advised “not to become obsessed about the rise of this political choice, but to pay more attention to the economic development in those countries to prevent frustration.” The lack of development and opportunity are considered “the breeding ground” where radical Islamist groups can gain strength. At both bilateral and multilateral levels, Spanish diplomacy defends financial assistance to these countries to prevent the growth of Salafi movements that “feed

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<sup>45</sup> Trinidad Jiménez, “La “primavera árabe”: una visión personal”, *El País*, December 16, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Bernardino León: “Es importante que los islamistas pasen por la experiencia del gobierno.” November 28, 2011 <http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20111028/bernardino-leon-importante-islamistas-pasen-experiencia-gobierno/471628.shtml>

<sup>47</sup> “Moratinos afirma que “no nos debe asustar el islamismo político moderado”, Agencia EFE November 29, 2011 <http://www.abc.es/agencias/noticia.asp?noticia=980959>

on populations lacking material hope.”<sup>48</sup> During his appearance before the parliament’s Foreign Affairs Commission to present his ministry’s general course of action, Minister José Manuel García Margallo stated, “we must make sure that the Arab Spring results in a summer of freedom and under no circumstances in a fundamentalist winter.”<sup>49</sup> This view could not hide the fact that the Spanish government would prefer other options. When the Islamist Green Alliance coalition came in third in the legislative elections held in Algeria in May 2012, the news was received with relief by the minister, who after learning the election results, declared at a press conference, “Thank God, the Islamists did not win in Algeria.”<sup>50</sup>

This post-revolutionary scenario—a far cry from the image constructed in Europe of the Arab Spring as a group of popular revolutions carried out by young liberals taking advantage of new technologies—has increased concerns about the potential impact that the rise of Islamism might have on human rights, freedom of conscience and, secondarily but always present, the status of women. These questions were presented in an opinion piece published by the Spanish Ambassador to Egypt who, despite emphasizing that the road to democratization would not be easy, noted the example of other countries like Turkey and Indonesia that “have shown that cultural synthesis is the approach with the greatest potential to find viable formulas for modernisation.”<sup>51</sup> The cautious, reassuring positions taken by Spanish politicians and diplomats have been questioned by some intellectuals with connections to the right who have expressed their mistrust in the face of the sudden conversion of the Muslim Brotherhood into moderate Islamists awaiting the favourable changes to come when they exercise power.<sup>52</sup>

Spain’s official position regarding this dynamic of change in the Arab world is to support the political and economic transitions that are underway, because its national security depends on the stability and prosperity of its southern Mediterranean neighbours. The role that Islamist movements are playing in the transition processes and the uprisings (e.g. in Libya and Syria) has forced the

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<sup>48</sup> “Margallo alerta del avance del islamismo radicar en Túnez si la UE no aporta ayudas económicas” 27/03/2012. In March 2011, the Spanish government pledged a €300,000,000 line of credit and told the European Union that the financial perspectives for 2014-2020 include a line of assistance to countries starting the transition.

<sup>49</sup> “Comparecencia del señor ministro de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación (García-Margallo Marfil), para informar sobre Las líneas generales de la política de su departamento” *Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados*, No. 42, p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> “Margallo dice que “gracias a Dios”, los islamistas no han ganado en Argelia,” *Europa Press*, May 14, 2012.

<sup>51</sup> Fidel Sendagorta, “Al Qaeda pierde, los Hermanos ganan,” *ABC*, January 31, 2012

<sup>52</sup> In this respect, Serafin Fanjul, a specialist in Arabic literature writes: Will the “moderates,” whose party is called the freedom party, legislate in favour of real freedom for women, even regarding marriage? Will they guarantee freedom of worship, including proselytism and the calling of others infidels, or at least stop burning churches? Will they lift the suffocating pressure on society regarding customs, clothing, rites, the omnipresence of the Quran everywhere?” Serafin Fanjul “Gana el Islam, pierden los árabes,” *ABC* January 3, 2012. The same author concluded another of her opinion columns stating, “while goo-goo [good government] and scatterbrained types insist—not many now, it must be said—on praising the Arab Spring, rampant Islamism is gaining ground and every step they take means more slashing of human rights. Watch out.” “Una firma por la Manouba,” *ABC*, May 18, 2012.

Spanish authorities to react. Their status as inevitable actors in the transition processes mean that they must search for stable and official channels for dialogue.<sup>53</sup> The Arab Spring has spurred establishing of relations with the Tunisian al-Nahda party and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and intensified the already existing links with groups like the Moroccan PJD. Spanish embassies have increased their contacts with a dynamic Islamist field that is increasingly plural, but also with liberal elites who rose to responsible positions after the disturbances and with whom there was almost no contact before (Majdoubi 2012: pp. 267-268). In Tunisia, Spanish Ambassador Antonio Cosano reached out to Rachid Ghannouchi, the leader of al-Nahda, for the first time after he returned from his exile in London in January 2011. In Egypt, the Spanish ambassador also formalized contact with the Muslim Brotherhood, which had been very limited. In March 2011, Spanish Ambassador Fidel Sendagorta made his first visit to the Muslim Brotherhood's headquarters in Cairo. Since then, contacts have intensified with the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the political wing of the Brotherhood and with the businessmen's lobby with connections to the organization, the Egyptian Development Business Association (EBDA).<sup>54</sup> Contacts in Egypt have also been made with other Islamist groups like al-Wasat and al-Tayyar al-Masry and the Salafi al-Nour party although in the last case, it is a counsellor and not the ambassador who is maintaining contact. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to participate in dialogue and debate forums sponsored by The Nyon Process, which, thanks to the new context, have been able to take place in southern Mediterranean countries like Tunisia.

The normalization of contacts with Islamist movements carried out from embassies has been accompanied by establishing relations in the political arena. The Spanish authorities are presenting the experience of the Spanish transition—and its inclusive approach towards all the political parties in the country that respected political norms—as a model for the processes of change in the Arab world. Prime Minister Zapatero in his visit to Tunisia in early March 2011—the first made by a European leader after President Ben Ali was overthrown—did just that. Socialist Minister for Foreign Affairs Trinidad Jiménez also invoked the Spanish transition model during a meeting with representatives of the 25 January Youth Coalition, a heterogeneous conglomerate including members from the Muslim Brotherhood, during her visit to Egypt.<sup>55</sup> Spanish political representatives

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<sup>53</sup> In July 2011, the Spanish government initiated a permanent dialogue with the Syrian opposition, after exhausting possible channels of dialogue with Bashar Al-Assad's regime and trying to mediate in the search for a peaceful solution to the uprisings. See "Bernardino León viaja a Damasco para proponer una conferencia en Madrid", *El País* July 15, 2011. In November 2011, Minister for Foreign Affairs Trinidad Jiménez received, for the first time, a delegation of six members of the Syrian National Council in Madrid, led by its spokesperson Ahmad Ramadan, which included two members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The delegation was also received by Jorge Moragas, the head of international relations for the People's Party. Miguel González "Jiménez recibe por vez primera a la oposición al régimen sirio", *El País* November 24, 2011.

<sup>54</sup> "Empresas españolas se reúnen con 'lobby' egipcio ligado a Hermanos Musulmanes", *ABC*, April 25, 2012. To watch the speech by the Spanish Ambassador during his visit to the EBDA: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1iN7z6WYpA&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1iN7z6WYpA&feature=player_embedded)

<sup>55</sup> "Jiménez dice que España "cumplirá sus obligaciones" ante una intervención en Libia" *El País* March 13, 2011

made their first contact with leaders of the Islamist movements in May 2011 by a delegation of parliamentarians visiting Egypt. The Spanish delegation<sup>56</sup> met with political actors from different affiliations including Saad el Katatni a leader of the Justice and Liberty Party. José Antonio Durán i Lleida, the president of the Spanish delegation and the parliament's Foreign Affairs Commission noted that "the Muslim Brotherhood is part of Egyptian society and a part of the population he says cannot be ignored."<sup>57</sup> His view of the Salafi groups was more critical, as he called them a "mortal danger for democracy." The preferences of the Spanish delegation inclined toward the secular parties, which they encouraged to unite and not run separately in the elections.<sup>58</sup>

Various think tanks and action tanks specializing in international relations, and partly financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, have also taken part in creating opportunities for dialogue with Islamist movements. One of the most active in terms of searching for channels for dialogue with Arab civil society, including Islamist movements, is the Toledo International Centre for Peace (CITpax).<sup>59</sup> Members of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (Toledo, 2006) and Hezbollah leaders (Toledo 2007) have participated in seminars held behind closed doors at the centre. CITpax has also taken part in informal meetings with representatives of Islamist movements organized in Geneva by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. In collaboration with this institution, CITpax organized a closed-door seminar in Madrid in July 2011 with leaders of al-Nahda, the PJD and the FJP, a few months before the first post-Arab Spring elections were held in Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt. The place chosen for the meeting, the Centre for Political and Constitutional Studies, was symbolic of the Spanish transition.

The election results and the forming of coalition governments headed by Islamist leaders in Tunisia and Morocco after the electoral victories of al-Nahda (October 2011) and the PJD (November 2011) have institutionalized and normalized contacts with internationally accepted leaders invited to participate in international forums such as the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos. The People's Party, which won the elections one week before the Davos meeting, issued a press release in November 2011 congratulating the PJD on its democratic victory and declaring their confidence that "their political and democratic commitment will benefit the general interest of the Moroccan people and also foster good bilateral relations."<sup>60</sup> Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy officially met with Secretary-General of the PJD and new Moroccan Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane during his first visit abroad, which was to Morocco. In February 2012, Saadeddine Othmani visited Spain in his capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs and also met with members of the government and the King of Spain. That same month, President Artur Mas of the Generalitat of Catalonia, the region with highest number of Moroccan immigrants in Spain, met with Benkirane

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<sup>56</sup> The delegation was made up of deputies from the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, the People's Party, the Catalan nationalist group *Convergència i Unió* and the Basque Nationalist Party.

<sup>57</sup> "Durán i Lleida dice que Hermanos Musulmanes son parte sociedad egipcia", *ABC*, May 31, 2011.

<sup>58</sup> "Delegación española insta a formar coalición laica frente Hermanos Musulmanes," *ABC* 1/6/2011.

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.toledopax.org/>

<sup>60</sup> [http://www.pp.es/actualidad-noticia/pp-felicita-justicia-desarrollo-por-su-victoria-democratica-electoral\\_5877.html](http://www.pp.es/actualidad-noticia/pp-felicita-justicia-desarrollo-por-su-victoria-democratica-electoral_5877.html)

during his visit to Morocco accompanied by a delegation of Catalan businesspeople. In March, José Antonio Duran i Lleida met with Saadeddine Othmani in Rabat, coinciding with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean meeting held in that city. In May 2012, the Moroccan Prime Minister made an official visit to Spain where he met with the President of the Government, the President of the Senate and the King and announced a conference on “democratic change in Morocco after the approval of the new constitution” in Barcelona at the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMED) headquarters.<sup>61</sup> The normalization of relations has also taken place with the al-Nahda party, which has presided over the coalition government formed in Tunisia since the elections to the National Constituent Assembly held in October 2011.<sup>62</sup> During his visit to Tunisia in March 2012, Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs García Margallo met with Tunisian Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali and his counterpart in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rafik Ben Abdessalam. During the visit, they agreed to hold a meeting between Tunisian and Spanish parliamentarians organized by the Fundación Carolina, allowing the foundation to extend its activities towards the Arab world. García Margallo reiterated Spain’s commitment to ensuring that the EU gives preferential treatment to Tunisia with the aim of consolidating “a democratic regime, with religious freedom, that can show neighbouring countries the path to follow to deepen relations with Europe.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> In July 2012, the IEMED organized a seminar on “Economic Agendas of Islamic Actors” with the participation of political and business leaders with connections to Turkey’s al-Nahda, PJD, FJP and JDP parties. <http://www.iemed.org/dossiers/dossiers-iemed/desenvolupament-socioeconomic/economic-agendas-of-islamic-actors/programme#top>

<sup>62</sup> The coalition government is made up of members from the Congress for the Republic, led by Moncef Marzouki who is also President of the Republic, and by the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (FDTL or Ettakatol) led by Mustapha Ben Jaafar, who became President of the National Constituent Assembly.

<sup>63</sup><http://www.laverdad.es/murcia/v/20120327/espana/principes-viajaran-tunez-para-20120327.html>

## **Israel and the Arab Spring: Understanding Attitudes and Responses to the "New Middle East"**

**By Benedetta Berti**

From the outset, the Arab Spring has taken the world by storm. It both challenged the political status quo in the Middle East and attempted to write a new chapter in the history of the region. Israel—with its complex geostrategic position and its difficult relations with its neighbors—was equally astounded when protests initially broke out throughout the region. Since then, Israel has responded to the shifting regional realities with a mix of timid hope and strong hesitance.

On the one hand, the current paradigm within Israel is that, in the long term, the potential process of democratization of the region could represent an opportunity for the country to improve its relations with some of its immediate neighbors. However, in the shorter term, there is widespread skepticism regarding the Arab Spring.

To some observers within Israel, the ongoing social and political unrest in the Middle East spells trouble. The crumbling of pre-existing regimes is viewed as a potential threat to regional security and stability. There is also a general uneasiness toward the rise of Islamist political parties. These organizations are believed to have stronger and more antagonist feelings towards the Israel than the pre-existing authoritarian regional regimes. As such, there is widespread concern that they will translate their anti-Israeli attitude into the official foreign policy of the countries where they now control large shares of political power. Consequently, it is assumed that the current shift in the region's political arena and the rise of political Islam will benefit the “Resistance Camp” in general, and groups like Hamas and Hezbollah specifically, while negatively affecting Israel.

However, not all political observers within Israel share this negative assessment. Many analysts dismiss this type of analysis as overly simplistic, emphasizing instead the importance of taking a more case-by-case approach when assessing the overall impact of the ongoing social and political changes. Similarly, they assert that Islamist organizations in the region are far from monolithic, and that the rise of the “Muslim Brotherhood-brand” of political Islam actually negatively affects the popularity of armed groups like Hezbollah.

This chapter analyzes the main attitudes in Israel regarding both the Arab Spring, as well as the subsequent rise of Islamist political parties across the Middle East. In doing so, it emphasizes the distinct postures adopted in different regional cases. Finally, the chapter looks at post-Arab Spring shifts in Israel's geostrategic and political position, looking specifically at the emerging Islamist parties' impact in redefining existing relations.



## Israel's Response to the “Arab Awakening”: Hope and Hesitance

When protests first broke out in Tunisia in late 2010, Israel took a wait-and-see approach, refraining from making public statements in support of either Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s regime or the opposition forces. This is hardly surprising, given the relations between the two countries. After a brief honeymoon during the 1990s—where both Tunisia and Israel opened interest offices in their respective counterparty—relations froze after the second intifada began in 2000. Since then, Tunisia has severed all official ties with the State of Israel, preserving, however, unofficial exchanges in sectors like trade and tourism.<sup>1</sup>

Over all, Ben Ali was not seen as a regional ally. Even so, the protests were not greeted with overwhelming enthusiasm.

First, when the autocratic regime fell, the Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu indirectly referred to Tunisia by expressing concern for the increased volatility of the Middle East and by wishing that “stability would be restored.”<sup>2</sup> He also stressed that the region’s instability further proved that Israel’s focus should remain on preserving its own national security.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond a concern for regional stability, several Israeli officials addressed the regime change in Tunisia more directly. They expressed apprehension about the future of unofficial ties between the two countries. These officials worried that Tunisia’s leadership change could sever the relationship it previously held with Israel.<sup>4</sup> Israeli vice Prime Minister Silvan Shalom—himself born in Tunisia—took these concerns one step further by voicing the fear that Tunisia would begin to drift toward the “extremist forces in the Arab world,”<sup>5</sup> referring to groups like Hamas or Hezbollah. From an Israeli perspective, the shift toward a political arena controlled or heavily influenced by political Islam is seen with inherent suspicion, as the common understanding is that such parties will display strong anti-Israeli attitudes, further complicating Israel’s standing in the region.

Similar concerns were voiced by the media and think-tank world, where the regime change was also considered a potential source of regional instability, especially in light of the potential “demonstration effect” of the protests on Israel’s neighbors, especially Jordan and Egypt.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mahmoud Muhareb, “Why is Israel Worried about the Tunisian Revolution?” *Arab center for Research and Policy Studies*, February 7, 2011. <http://english.dohainstitute.org/Home/Details/5ea4b31b-155d-4a9f-8f4d-a5b428135cd5/2252aae6-511b-416f-b233-ae0027efbf19>

<sup>2</sup>Herb Keinon, “Monday Region’s Events Show Why Ironclad Security Deal Is So Necessary, PM Says,” *Jerusalem Post*, January 17, 2011. <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P1-188587361.html>

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>“Netanyahu: Tunisia—A Proof that We Must Retain Security,” *Israel Armed Forces Radio Website*, January 16, 2011. <http://glz.co.il/newsArticle.aspx?newsid=75755> (Hebrew)

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Shlomo Brom, “The Toppling of the Tunisian Regime: Ramifications for the Arab World,” *INSS Insight* No. 238, January 20, 2011. <http://www.inss.org.il/upload/%28FILE%291295508858.pdf>

In contrast to the relative understated reaction to the protests in Tunisia, Israel's response was unequivocal when the demonstrations sparked by the Arab Spring spread to Egypt. The relationship between Israel and the Mubarak regime was far from perfect, with the Egyptian government never fully investing in creating a *de facto* peace with Israel after the 1979 treaty. Also, Hosni Mubarak was known to cultivate, and even foment, anti-Israeli feelings among his population to deflect criticism of his regime. Yet, despite the problematic relationship, the Israeli government largely credited Mubarak with having preserved peace and stability for roughly three decades. Therefore, it is no surprise that at the beginning of the anti-government demonstrations Israeli officials largely hoped that the status quo would be restored. This was the case, even though the government refrained from making public statements about the crisis or supporting any of the warring parties.<sup>7</sup>

According to former chief of general staff MK Shaul Mofaz, the best scenario for Israel would have been for the regime to overcome the protests.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Israel went beyond mere statements in signaling its support of the Mubarak government. The government allegedly attempted to diffuse American and European criticism of the Egyptian regime, and also allowed Egyptian troops to deploy in the Sinai (Israel's agreement is needed according to the 1979 peace treaty).<sup>9</sup>

With the escalating protests, more Israeli officials went on record to express their concerns over the stability and security of the region. They stressed the importance Israel places upon preserving the peace treaty with Egypt. Israel, in fact, sees the agreement as one of the cornerstones of regional stability. For instance, former Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) chief of general staff Lt.-Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi stated that the unrest could represent a threat to Israel,<sup>10</sup> a concern seconded by PM Netanyahu, who also underscored the importance of investing in security arrangements, as well as on preserving the peace treaty.<sup>11</sup>

These concerns about Egypt largely coincided with those already expressed over regime change in Tunisia. However, regarding Egypt, the stakes were seen as substantially higher, not only because of the existing peace treaty between the two countries, but also because of Egypt's geostrategic position and its influence on the regional balance of power. This is why the Israeli PM openly expressed the fear that Iran would attempt to stir the Egyptian uprisings in its direction, trying to increase its

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<sup>7</sup> Ian Black, "Egypt Protests: Israel Fears Unrest May Threaten Peace Treaty," *The Guardian*, January 31, 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/31/israel-egypt-mubarak-peace-treaty-fears>

<sup>8</sup> Rebecca Anna Stoil, "Mofaz: It's Best For Israel If Mubarak Overcomes Protests," *Jerusalem Post*, February 1, 2011. <http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=206131>

<sup>9</sup> Ian Black, "Egypt Protests: Israel Fears Unrest May Threaten Peace Treaty," *The Guardian*, January 31, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Yaakov Katz, "Ashkenazi: Unrest Could Change Our Security Reality," *Jerusalem Post*, February 2, 2011. <http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=206263>

<sup>11</sup> "Excerpts from PM Netanyahu's statement at the Knesset," *Israeli Prime Minister's Office website*, February 2, 2011.

[http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/2011/PM\\_Netanyahu\\_addresses\\_Knesset\\_situation\\_Egypt\\_2-Feb-2011](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/2011/PM_Netanyahu_addresses_Knesset_situation_Egypt_2-Feb-2011)

leverage in the post-Mubarak era. In Israel's view, an increase in Tehran's influence is clearly identified as a direct security threat.<sup>12</sup>

However, this growing anxiety over the state of the peace treaty, the calm along the Israeli-Egyptian border, and the rising influence of Iran gradually diminished in the days following Mubarak's resignation, with Israel Defense Minister Ehud Barak immediately seeking (and reportedly obtaining) reassurances on the peace treaty with chief of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi.<sup>13</sup>

Even so, a few months into the Arab Spring, the emerging consensus within the Israeli political establishment was still deeply pessimistic. In addition to the threat to regional stability, there was growing skepticism over the revolts' potential to lead to a true democratization process.

PM Netanyahu expressed this paradigm in April 2011, when he said “[w]hat we hope to see is the European Spring of 1989.” He added, however, that there was an increasing chance of encountering an “Iranian Winter.”<sup>14</sup> The PM was referring to the perception that the uprisings were being increasingly hijacked by Islamist groups, a notion commonly referred to in Israel as the “Islamic winter.”

A few months later, in November 2011, the PM went even further by stating that “the chances are that an Islamist wave will wash over the Arab countries, an anti-West, anti-liberal, anti-Israel and ultimately an anti-democratic wave.”<sup>15</sup>

Of course, the increased skepticism regarding the Arab Spring has been going hand-in-hand with the rise of Islamist parties and the perception that “[t]he biggest winner of the past year is political Islam—in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and (perhaps soon) in Syria.”<sup>16</sup>

This is especially true when analyzing the reactions to the rising popularity of Islamist groups in Egypt—where the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists first won over two thirds of seats in the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Isabel Kershner, “As Egypt Begins to Calm Down, So Do Israeli Nerves,” *New York Times*, February 14, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/14/world/middleeast/14israel.html>

<sup>14</sup> “Arab Spring May Turn Into Iranian Winter: Israel PM,” *Agence France Presse*, April 17, 2011. <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5j4sOmN0rkFs8yT2KSqtpiuGyrj5g?docId=CNG.eb63d08c46fc03277ee2b129a6b13866.c41>

<sup>15</sup> “Excerpts from PM Netanyahu's statement at the Knesset,” *Israeli Prime Minister's Office website*, November 23, 2011.

[http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/2011/PM\\_Netanyahu\\_statement\\_Knesset\\_23-Nov-2011](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/2011/PM_Netanyahu_statement_Knesset_23-Nov-2011)

<sup>16</sup> Amos Yadlin, “The Arab Uprising One Year On,” in *One Year of the Arab Spring: Global and Regional Implications*, Guzansky, Yoel and Heller, Mark A., eds. (INSS Memorandum No. 113, Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, March 2012), p. 15.

Egyptian Parliament,<sup>17</sup> and with Muslim Brotherhood's candidate Mohamed Morsi winning the Presidency. Even though Israel's government officially congratulated Egypt on its newly elected legislative body,<sup>18</sup> the country is extremely troubled by this trend and it has not found a way to open a channel of communication with Egypt's Islamists.<sup>19</sup> As the next section consider, it is no surprise that Israel views the rise of the vehemently anti-Zionist Muslim Brotherhood as a troublesome trend, especially when combined with an extremely antagonist public opinion.

Therefore, when looking at the evolving Arab Spring and the subsequent regime changes occurring in both Tunisia and Egypt, the Tel Aviv's concerns include regional stability, an opening for Tehran to increase its influence, a potential challenge to the peace treaty with Egypt, and, last but not least, the rapid rise of political Islam in the Middle East. Furthermore, the possibility that the "troubles" could spread to Jordan—the second regional player to have signed an official peace treaty with Israel—has also been considered a threat resulting from the Arab awakenings.

However, not all political observers within Israel concur with this pessimistic assessment of reality. For instance, Lior Ben-Dor, the Foreign Ministry's Arabic media spokesman has asserted that, from Israel's perspective, "(...) by and large little has changed. They don't hate us any less than before. But not any more than before, either."<sup>20</sup>

In addition to diffusing fears stemming from the Arab uprisings, some Israeli political observers and politicians have also referred to the upheavals as a potential opportunity for Israel. Israeli President Shimon Peres stated: "Poverty and oppression in the region have fed resentment against Israel and the better our neighbors will have it, we shall have better neighbors," arguing that regional democratization is exactly what Israel needs to be more secure and prosperous.<sup>21</sup> Within the media and the think tank world, many analysts have argued along the same lines, stressing how none of the deposed regimes—including in Egypt—has ever been genuinely interested in building a positive relation with Israel. Furthermore, they have contended that the Arab Spring has so far not

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<sup>17</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick, "Islamists Win 70% of Seats in the Egyptian Parliament," *New York Times*, January 21, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/22/world/middleeast/muslim-brotherhood-wins-47-of-egypt-assembly-seats.html>

<sup>18</sup> "Egypt; Israel Foreign Ministry Congratulates Nation for People's Assembly," *Africa News*, January 26, 2012 (available from LexisNexis).

<sup>19</sup> "Israeli Foreign Ministry Denies Opening Dialogue With Egypt's Islamists," *Egypt Independent*, January 4, 2012. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/israeli-foreign-ministry-denies-opening-dialogue-egypts-islamists>

<sup>20</sup> Juliane von Mittelstaedt, "In the Eye of the Storm Israel Wary of Changes in the Arab World," *Der Spiegel*, April 6, 2012. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/israel-skeptical-of-the-regime-changes-in-the-arab-world-a-825510.html>

<sup>21</sup> "Mideast revolutions could be good for Israel, says Peres," *The Associated Press*, March 28, 2011. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/mideast-revolutions-could-be-good-for-israel-says-peres-1.352374>

empowered Israel's regional foes, like Iran, and it has also negatively affected the popularity of other anti-Israeli groups like Hezbollah.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, political observers within Israel have been asserting that political Islam is not monolithic in attitude toward Israel, while also debating whether, once in a position of power, Islamist parties will be forced to “being rather more ambivalent about their hostility to Israel, or at least about the urgency with which they intend to act on it.”<sup>23</sup>

Syria is a clear case where Israel has been struggling between its fears and hopes. On the one hand, Israel sees Bashar al-Assad's demise and his regime as a strong blow against Iran, as well as an opening a new chapter with its northern neighbor. In addition, since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, the violence repeatedly spilled into Israel, with several episodes of errant Syrian mortars shells landing on the Israeli side of the disputed border.<sup>24</sup> Assad also sporadically sparked clashes with Israel along the Golan Heights as a tool to divert domestic attention from the anti-regime protests. The clashes between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Palestinian refugees in May and June 2011 were, in this sense, seen by Israel as part of Assad's attempts to shift the domestic attention away from local demonstrations.<sup>25</sup> Although few within Israel believe that Assad would ever risk entering a full-fledged military confrontation against Israel, his regime's demise would remove the threat of these renewed skirmishes at the border.

On the other hand, the Israeli government has been worried about the potential rise of yet another Islamist regime at its own border. Furthermore, though Israel never trusted the Alawite regime in Syria, the Assads had shown both restraint and predictability, avoiding direct confrontations with Israel and keeping the border quiet. Israel worries about the Syrian state's collapse and the potential creation of a power vacuum within Syria, and specifically next to the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights.

As such, especially in the early stage of the protests, Israel had a lively public debate regarding whether the country should support Assad or the anti-government opposition forces. For example, Druze MK and member of the ruling Likud Party Ayoub Kara openly stated, “I prefer the political extremism of Assad over religious extremism,” adding “[w]e don't want religious extremism on the

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<sup>22</sup> Benedetta Berti, “Can Hezbollah Cope With A Changing Middle East?” *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, November 2011. <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/2011/201111.berti.hezbollah.html>

<sup>23</sup> Mark A. Heller, “Israeli Responses to the Arab Spring,” in *One Year of the Arab Spring: Global and Regional Implications*, Guzansky, Yoel and Heller, Mark A., eds. (INSS Memorandum No. 113, Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, March 2012), p. 76.

<sup>24</sup> Benedetta Berti, “Is an Israeli-Syrian War Next?,” *FPRI*, November 18, 2012. <http://www.fpri.org/geopoliticus/2012/11/israeli-syrian-war-next>

<sup>25</sup> Joel Greenberg, “Netanyahu Accuses Syria Of Abetting Border Clash,” *Washington Post*, June 6, 2011. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/netanyahu-accuses-syria-of-abetting-border-clash/2011/06/06/AGYCeaKH\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/netanyahu-accuses-syria-of-abetting-border-clash/2011/06/06/AGYCeaKH_story.html)

border.”<sup>26</sup> National infrastructure Minister Uzi Landau claimed the exact opposite by stating: “[t]he only thing I know is that if he [Assad] falls there will be big short-term advantages.”<sup>27</sup>

In the early months of the Syrian crisis, Israel kept a low profile, while denying any direct involvement with either Assad or the opposition.<sup>28</sup> For instance, in an April 2011 interview Israeli PM Netanyahu openly said that, on Syria, “Any answer I’ll give you wouldn’t be a good one,”<sup>29</sup> hinting at an awareness that openly endorsing the Syrian opposition forces would hinder their domestic stance and legitimacy, while strengthening Assad’s accusations that the opposition is a “puppet” of Israel and the United States.

While the general Israeli policy was to stay out of the Syrian crisis, still several Israeli politicians came out in support of the protests even in these relatively early stages. In March 2011, Israeli President Shimon Peres expressed solidarity with the protesters by stating: “[d]emocracy needs to be allowed into a country the moment the young generation opens its eyes. The young people have questions about why they are living in poverty. A family that cannot provide food for itself is tragic.”<sup>30</sup> Also, in May 2011, Israeli MK Shaul Mofaz reportedly urged Russia to stop supplying advanced weaponry to the Syrian regime in the context of a meeting between Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee members and their counterparty in Russia.<sup>31</sup>

In the following months, as the Syrian crisis escalated, Israel gradually switched from ambivalence to condemnation of the Syrian regime. This shift occurred together with the realization that Assad was not likely to survive the political storm ignited by the protests. By the end of 2011, the general assessment within Israel was that the Assad regime was doomed and that its fall was indeed “inevitable.”<sup>32</sup> In this context, Israel first offered humanitarian aid to Syria through the International Committee of the Red Cross in March 2012. Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman stated: “[e]ven though Israel cannot intervene in events occurring in a country with which it does not have

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<sup>26</sup> Joshua Mitnick, “Amid Syria’s Turmoil, Israel Sees Assad As The Lesser Evil,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 6, 2011. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2011/0506/Amid-Syria-s-turmoil-Israel-sees-Assad-as-the-lesser-evil>

<sup>27</sup> Herb Keinon: “If PNA Goes To UN, Declare All Agreements Null, Says Landau,” *Jerusalem Post*, August 30, 2011. <http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=236068>

<sup>28</sup> “Israel “Closely Following” Events In Syria—Minister,” *Israel Defense Forces website*, March 27, 2011 (available from BBC Worldwide Monitoring).

<sup>29</sup> Joel Greenberg, “Israel Warily Reckons Possible Outcomes In Syria,” *The Washington Post*, April 23, 2011. <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-28514103.html>

<sup>30</sup> Yaakov Katz, “IDF: Assad May Create Tension At Border To Divert Attention From Troubles At Home,” *Jerusalem Post*, March 23, 2011. <http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=213369>

<sup>31</sup> “Israeli Knesset Members Ask Russia To Halt Supply Of Advanced Weaponry To Syria,” *Israeli Voice of Israel Network B*, May 13, 2011 (Available from BBC Monitoring Middle East).

<sup>32</sup> Isabel Kershner, “Israel, Expecting Syrian Collapse, Braces for Refugees,” *New York Times*, January 11, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/11/world/middleeast/israel-braces-for-refugees-in-event-of-syria-collapse.html>

diplomatic relations, it is nevertheless our moral duty to extend humanitarian aid and inspire the world to put an end to the slaughter.”<sup>33</sup>

Then a few weeks later, following the Syrian regime increased violence (and specifically after the massacre of civilians in Houla on May 25 2012), Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak went beyond mere condemnation and said: “[t]hese events in Syria compel the world to take action, not just talk, but action. These are crimes against humanity and the international community must not stand on the sidelines.”<sup>34</sup>

In this later stage of the Syrian crisis, Israel has taken a very different posture from that assumed during the protests in both Tunis and Cairo, assuming a more positive attitude toward a possible regime change.

This, of course, does not mean that Israel has resolved its extremely conflicted relation with the ongoing uprisings, with the country pondering whether the short term instability will be rewarded with a genuine democratization process, or whether new authoritarian and Islamist regimes will rise on the ashes of the previous ones, further complicating Israel’s position in the Middle East. Until this point is further clarified, Israel's attitude will continue to be a mix of timid hope, hesitance, and skepticism.

### **Israel and its Neighbors after the “Spring”**

With Israel perceiving the Arab Spring as both a potential threat as well as an opportunity, the Israeli government has been watching closely how the relationships of the country have evolved with the new “post-Arab Spring” governments, respectively in Tunisia and Egypt.

When regarding Tunisia, Israel does not perceive the situation as particularly worrisome, nor does it see a substantial deterioration in the (already weak) ties. Even after the Islamist *Ennahda* party won the Constituent Assembly's elections in October 2011,<sup>35</sup> Tunisia has still been perceived as a potential “model” for the Arab Spring. The country is viewed as embarking in a democratic transition, while attempting to strike a balance between secular and religion values, looking to emulate Turkey, rather than Iran.

Even so, the Israeli government considers a few issues problematic. First, the future of Tunisia’s ancient Jewish community is a growing worry. On this issue *Ennahda* and its government have been giving somewhat mixed signals. The government has been firm in reiterating its desire to protect all citizens, regardless of religion. For instance, Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki participated in the

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<sup>33</sup> Tova Lazaroff, “Israel Offers Humanitarian Aid to Syrian People,” *Jerusalem Post*, March 5, 2012. <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=260451>

<sup>34</sup> Douglas Hamilton, “Israel Urges Tougher Action Against Assad,” *Reuters*, May 30, 2012. <http://www.inss.org.il/upload/%28FILE%291338453132.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> “Tunisia Coalition Agrees Top Government Posts,” *BBC News*, November 21, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15830583>

ceremony commemorating the ten year anniversary of the 2002 al Qaeda attack against the El Ghriba synagogue in Djerba and stated “any vandalism or violence against the Tunisian Jewish people, their property or their holy sites is totally unacceptable.”<sup>36</sup> Similar declarations have also come from *Ennahda* party leader and Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, who has expressed Tunisia's desire to welcome Jewish pilgrims to visit the El Ghriba synagogue.<sup>37</sup> Yet, in the past year, Salafist groups have publically called to wage “war against the Jews.”<sup>38</sup> For example, during Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh's visit, organized by *Ennahda* in January 2012, a group of Salafists greeted him by chanting “[k]ill the Jews.” *Ennahda* responded to these chants by condemnations, adding that it believed that: “these slogans, which contradict the spirit of Islam, (...) were uttered by a fringe group aiming to undermine Ennahda's activities and tarnish its image.”<sup>39</sup> Even so, the party has been criticized as being “too soft” on the Salafists and as not doing enough to protect the country's Jewish community from this type of attacks.<sup>40</sup>

Of course, the Hamas's visit has been a reason for concern from an Israeli perspective, as the country fears that the rise of Islamist groups in the region will strengthen the standing of Hamas, while weakening Fatah and the secular-nationalist alternative within the Palestinian society. In this sense, *Ennahda's* invitation to Hamas was seen as a partial confirmation of this trend, although in reality the visit has not translated into any concrete political cooperation.

Secondly, Israel has been closely watching the ongoing debate over Tunisia's future constitution, focusing specifically on the dispute regarding inserting a clause that would ban all ties with Israel and prohibit “normalization.”<sup>41</sup> Adding the “anti-normalization” clause in the constitution has been supported by both Islamist parties, including *Ennahda*, as well as leftist Arab nationalist parties, led by the Tunisian Communist Labour Party.<sup>42</sup> In addition to enshrining this principle in the

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<sup>36</sup> Kouichi Shirayanagi, "President Moncef Marzouki Visits Djerba Synagogue on Ten Year Anniversary of Al-Qaeda Attack," *TunisiaLive*, April 11, 2012. <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/04/11/president-moncef-marzouki-visits-djerba-synagogue-on-ten-year-anniversary-of-al-qaeda-attack/>

<sup>37</sup> Kouichi Shirayanagi, "What future for Tunisia's Jews?" *The Guardian*, May 9, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/may/09/tunisia-jews-pilgrimage-el-ghriba>

<sup>38</sup> Kouichi Shirayanagi, "President Moncef Marzouki Visits Djerba Synagogue on Ten Year Anniversary of Al-Qaeda Attack," *TunisiaLive*, April 11, 2012; "Ennahdha a-t-il perdu le contrôle de ses troupes?" *Le Temps*, January 8, 2012 <http://www.letemps.com.tn/article-62335.html> [French]; Ahmed Ellali, "Several Thousand Salafists Demonstrate for Islamic Law, Attack Dramatists in Tunis," *TunisiaLive*, March 25, 2012. <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/03/25/several-thousand-salafists-demonstrate-for-islamic-law-attack-dramatists-in-tunis/>

<sup>39</sup> "Tunisia Islamist Leader Condemns Anti-Semitic Slogans," *Agence France Presse*, January 10, 2012. <http://www.ejpress.org/article/55488>

<sup>40</sup> "Ennahdha a-t-il perdu le contrôle de ses troupes?" *Le Temps*, January 8, 2012 <http://www.letemps.com.tn/article-62335.html> [French]

<sup>41</sup> "Tunisian Reform Council Split Over Future Relations With Israel," *al-Jazeera TV*, June 17, 2011 (Available through BBC Monitoring Middle East).

<sup>42</sup> "Tunisian Parties Call For Incriminating Normalization With Israel," BBC Monitoring Middle East, July 8 2011; Oren Kessler, "Tunisia's Draft Constitution Would Ban Ties With Israel. Some Officials Want Clause



constitution, talks have also mentioned inserting a clause in the penal code to sanction individuals and companies that hold any relations with Israel.<sup>43</sup> However, there is no consensus over these issues, with *Ennahdha* actually distancing itself from the early proposal, and with the Foreign Minister Rafik Abdesslem on record opposing inserting such a clause in the constitution, while reiterating that Tunisia would never recognize Israel anyway.<sup>44</sup> In this sense, *Ennahdha* has been unequivocal in its rejection of either recognizing or upgrading ties with Israel, while also falling short from making dramatic changes in the country's foreign policy.<sup>45</sup>

The constitutional debate can be seen as a sign of the increased antagonism toward Israel, itself a consequence of the rise of political Islam in Tunisia. This trend also reflects the internal political struggle between more mainstream Islamist parties, like *Ennahdha*, and the Salafist political forces within Tunisia. Specifically, *Ennahdha's* tough stance on Israel stems from its values and history, but also is a byproduct of the party's attempt to appease the Salafist groups.

Even so, the debate regarding banning all ties with Israel should not be analyzed as just a consequence of the rise of Islamist parties, since the main proponents of the clause have actually come from the ranks of the extreme left. What's more, the ongoing discussion also reflects the general negative attitude of the domestic public opinion towards Israel. As such, anti-Israeli feelings go deeper and extend beyond the Islamist ranks.

The concerns Israel faces when analyzing post-Arab Spring Tunisia do pale when compared to the progressive strains in the security, economic, and political relations between Israel and its neighbor, Egypt. From an Israeli perspective, post-Mubarak Egypt is presenting a whole new set of challenges that go well beyond the rise of political Islam in the country.

First, Israel sees Egypt as increasingly less stable and able to provide security within its borders, which in turn has raised fears over the proliferation of jihadists groups in the Sinai area, a direct security threat to Israel. Understandably, these fears were further heightened after August 2011, when a Palestinian militant cell entered Israel from the Sinai and perpetrated an attack in the south of country, near Eilat.<sup>46</sup> The attack also served as a powerful reminder of the frailty of Israeli-Egyptian relations. In fact, while pursuing the attackers, Israel engaged in cross-border shootings,

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Removed, But Face Opposition From Islamists And Their Allies," *Jerusalem Post*, July 18, 2011.

<http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P1-194951355.html>

<sup>43</sup> "Tunisia: Move to Criminalize Normalization of Relations with Israel in the New Penal Code," *Global Legal Monitor*, the Law Library of Congress, March 27, 2012.

[http://www.loc.gov/lawweb/servlet/lloc\\_news?disp3\\_l205403054\\_text](http://www.loc.gov/lawweb/servlet/lloc_news?disp3_l205403054_text)

<sup>44</sup> "Criminalization of Normalization with Israel Divides the Political Arena of Tunisia," *Al Byan*, March 22, 2012. <http://www.albayan.ae/one-world/arabs/2012-03-22-1.1616260> [Arabic]

<sup>45</sup> "Tunisia's Ghannouchi rules out normal ties with Israel," *Press TV*, April 1, 2012.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/234200.html>

<sup>46</sup> Richard Spencer, "Chaos On Its Borders Could See Israel's Worst Fears Realized," *Telegraph*, August 18, 2011. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/8709665/Chaos-on-its-borders-could-see-Israel's-worst-fears-realised.html>

killing five Egyptian security officers.<sup>47</sup> In turn, this led to massive anti-Israel protests within Egypt, culminating with the Egyptian government—pressured by the public outcry—threatening to withdraw its Ambassador from Tel Aviv.<sup>48</sup> While the bilateral diplomatic crisis was diffused after Israel expressed regret for the deaths and announced an investigation into the matter,<sup>49</sup> Israel remained largely unpopular on the Egyptian street. In turn, this led to a fully-fledged assault on the Israeli Embassy on September 9, 2011<sup>50</sup>—marking an all-time low in bilateral relations.

Following the August attack, Israel has allowed Egypt to deploy more troops in Sinai to conduct counterterrorism operations,<sup>51</sup> while the Israeli government has continued to coordinate with Egyptian security forces.<sup>52</sup> Even so, the Israeli government remains worried about the perceived power vacuum within Sinai, especially after the August 2012 attack, where a group of militants assaulted an Egyptian security outpost in Sinai, killing sixteen soldiers, and then attempting to cross the border into Israel.<sup>53</sup>

Secondly, in the months since the fall of the Mubarak regime, Israel has been increasingly concerned over the progressive deterioration of the economic ties with Egypt, especially regarding its willingness and capacity to export gas to Israel. In the past year, pipelines delivering Egyptian gas to Israel were periodically attacked<sup>54</sup> until Egypt decided to unilaterally suspend gas deliveries in April 2012.<sup>55</sup> Both Egyptian and Israeli authorities were quick to diffuse the crisis and assert that the suspension was not motivated by political reasons. Egyptian authorities referred to both the “unfair” deal Israel got under Mubarak, as well as to Israel’s alleged agreement violations as the causes of the

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<sup>47</sup> Dina Zayed And Marwa Awad, "Egypt To Create Border Buffer; Hundreds Protest Angrily At Israeli Embassy After Five Security Officers Killed Last Week," *The Gazette*, August 23, 2011. (Available from LexisNexis).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Joel Greenberg, "Israel Mulls Ties With A Changed Egypt," *Washington Post*, August 28, 2011.

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/israel-mulls-ties-with-a-changed-egypt/2011/08/25/gIQA3Sc6iJ\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/israel-mulls-ties-with-a-changed-egypt/2011/08/25/gIQA3Sc6iJ_story.html); Yaakov Katz, “Barak Apologizes to Egypt over Security Officers’ Deaths,” *The Jerusalem Post*, August 20, 2011.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=234621>

<sup>50</sup> "Crowds Attack Israel Embassy In Cairo," *Al-Jazeera*, September 10, 2011.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/09/201199225334494935.html>

<sup>51</sup> "Israel Considers Egypt's Request To Deploy More Troops In Sinai," *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, August 31, 2011.

<sup>52</sup> Yaakov Katz "Israel, Egypt To Work Together Against Terror," *Jerusalem Post*, February 24, 2012.

<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=259104>

<sup>53</sup> Benedetta Berti, Zack Gold, "Security Vacuum in the Sinai," *The National Interest*, August 10, 2012.

<http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/the-security-vacuum-the-sinai-7317?page=show>

<sup>54</sup> "Egypt; Gas Pipeline in El Arish Blown up for the Tenth Time" *Egypt State Information Service*, December 19, 2011 (available from LexisNexis).

<sup>55</sup> Oren Kessler and Herb Keinon: "Egypt Terminates Gas Flow To Israel" *Jerusalem Post*, April 23, 2012.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=267112>

suspension.<sup>56</sup> However, the interruption of the gas exports is indeed a sign of the ongoing deterioration of a bilateral relation that was never fully “normalized.”

In this sense, both the deteriorating security situation in Sinai and the downgrading of economic ties are related. Both reflect the main issue that Israel has faced since the collapse of the Mubarak regime, namely, the souring of the political and diplomatic relations with Egypt. This trend can be equally represented by both the arrest of an alleged Israeli “spy” in June 2011 (later release in a “face saving” prisoner swap in October 2011),<sup>57</sup> as well as by the already mentioned violent storming of the Israeli Embassy only a few months later.

The latter episode also showed the SCAF’s internal tensions, focused on diffusing internal unrest, as well as preserving calm with Israel and good ties with the United States, and growing anti-Israel public opinion.

These anti-Israel demonstrations can also serve to assess the impact that Islamist groups are having in shaping the foreign policy debate in the “new” Egypt. Again, even more than in Tunisia, anti-Israeli feelings within Egypt run very deep and go beyond the influence of Islamist parties. However, Islamist parties have been adding fuel to the anti-Israeli fire. For instance, in March 2012 the Islamist-dominated lower house of the Egyptian Parliament issued a declaration calling Israel the number one enemy of the country.<sup>58</sup>

From an Israeli perspective this type of rhetoric is certainly troublesome. At the same time, Israel is also aware that the inflammatory statement adopted by the lower house of the Parliament is only declaratory and has no concrete policy effect. As such, Israel has been attempting to understand the difference between the anti-Israeli discourse employed by Islamist parties for electoral gains, and the actual policies they intend to implement. Furthermore, Israel also seeks to understand the different postures of the main Islamist parties on this issue, assuming that political Islam is far from monolithic within Egypt. Both questions are seen as crucial to understanding the future of the Israeli-Egyptian relation, as well as the stability of the peace treaty—which is certainly seen by Israel as the number one issue in determining such future.

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<sup>56</sup> Shmuel Even, "Egypt's Revocation of the Natural Gas Agreement with Israel: Strategic Implications," *INSS Insight* No. 332, May 6, 2012. <http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=6488>

<sup>57</sup> Yaakov Katz; Hilary Leila Krieger, "Alleged Israeli 'Spy' Held In Cairo Is US Immigrant," *Reuters* and *Jerusalem Post*, June 14, 2011. <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=224873>; Kristen Chick, "Egypt Saves Face in Swap of Alleged Israeli Spy Ilan Grapel," *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 27, 2011. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2011/1027/Egypt-saves-face-in-swap-of-alleged-Israeli-spy-Ilan-Grapel>

<sup>58</sup> Zvi Mazel, "Egypt Steers Uneasy Course In Dealings With Israel." *Jerusalem Post*, March 14, 2012. <http://www.pressdisplay.com/pressdisplay/viewer.aspx>

Since Mubarak's fall, in fact, the SCAF has clearly pledged to "honor previous commitments, including the peace treaty with Israel."<sup>59</sup> However, there had initially been a lot more ambiguity on the issue coming from Egypt's main Islamist political parties.

First, the Muslim Brotherhood expressed an ambivalent attitude regarding the peace treaty with Israel, alternating conciliatory remarks with "war declarations" and pledges to end the treaty.<sup>60</sup> This ambiguity is not surprising. Anti-Zionism has been a strong feature of the Muslim Brotherhood since the founding of the group in the late 1920s. In addition, over the last decades, the Brotherhood has proven a champion of the Palestinian cause, while preserving ties with the Palestinian Hamas, which itself started as the Gaza-based branch of the Brotherhood. Similarly, within Egypt, the group had opposed the peace treaty back in 1979 and has, in the past decades, been unequivocal in rejecting any normalization process. As such, acting to end the peace treaty with Israel would be in line with both the Brotherhood's history, as well as its ideology.

Yet, in practice, the Muslim Brotherhood has also shown a remarkable understanding of *realpolitik*, and specifically of the correlation between preserving the peace treaty and continuing to receive badly needed U.S. aid. On this matter, when an Egyptian-American crisis broke out in February 2012 over the investigations of several civil society groups and democracy activists (including a number of U.S. citizens) and the United States threatened to withhold aid, the Brotherhood message was clear: "We (Egypt) are a party (to the treaty) and we will be harmed, so it is our right to review the matter."<sup>61</sup>

As a result of this internal struggle between ideology and pragmatism, the group initially adopted an ambivalent position on the peace treaty. While it has not ruled out reviewing some terms of the treaty, the Brotherhood has largely reiterated that it will neither attempt to abrogate it nor put it to a national referendum (an option the group had initially raised).<sup>62</sup> However, from an Israeli perspective, even the prospect of "revisions" is seen as highly alarming and the country will likely use its influence, as well as rely on the United States—the guarantor of the agreement—to make sure this option is shelved. This is because Israel sees opening the treaty up for negotiation as tantamount to its collapse. At the same time, Israel has also been increasingly willing to let Egypt deploy more of its troops in the Sinai, opting for a *de facto*, rather than a *de jure*, revision of some the treaty terms. On the issue of preserving the peace treaty, Egypt's second main Islamist force, the

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<sup>59</sup>Michael Sharnoff, "Post-Mubarak Egyptian Attitudes Toward Israel," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, October 2011. <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/2011/201110.sharnoff.egyptandisrael.html>

<sup>60</sup>Yaakov Lappin, "Muslim Brotherhood Leader: 'Prepare Egyptians For War With Israel,'" *Jerusalem Post*, February 1, 2011. <http://www.jpost.com/Headlines/Article.aspx?id=206130>; Eli Lake, "Muslim Brotherhood Seeks End to Israel Treaty," *The Washington Times*, February 4, 2011.

<sup>61</sup>Tom Perry, "Aid Cuts Could Put Egypt-Israel Peace In Jeopardy," *Reuters*, February 17, 2012.

<http://www.montrealgazette.com/news/cuts+could+Egypt+Israel+peace+jeopardy/6167181/story.html>

<sup>62</sup>Zvi Bar'el, "Muslim Brotherhood: We Will Not Put Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty To Referendum," *HaAretz*, April 22, 2012.

Salafi al-Nour party, has also proven ambiguous, declaring this it would seek to alter some of its terms, while pledging not to revoke it.<sup>63</sup>

Israel considers the Muslim Brotherhood's ascent as a potential threat for two additional reasons: the possibility of an improvement in the Egyptian-Iranian relation, as well as the positive effect the Brotherhood's political power could have on Hamas. With respect to Iran, leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood have urged Egypt to upgrade its ties with the Islamic Republic,<sup>64</sup> even though the alleged *rapprochement* is far from significant at this stage. On the contrary, Egypt's foreign policy is aiming at preserving good ties with all main regional players, from Iran to Saudi Arabia.

Similarly, Israel fears that the pre-existing ties between the Brotherhood and Hamas will both boost Hamas politically, as well as allow the flow of weapons to and from Gaza. However, in reality, Egypt has continued—beyond its rhetoric—to hold a tight grip on Gaza, also to the detriment of Gaza's civilian population. Furthermore, when it comes to empowering Hamas and encouraging “radicalization,” it actually appears that the Muslim Brotherhood has instead at least partially used its influence on the group to pressure the Gaza-based Islamist organization to work toward true reconciliation with Fatah. The group has also said it agrees with Hamas's *de facto* acceptance of coexistence of Israel, while specifying the Muslim Brotherhood would not object to a two-state solution “provided that this state within the '67 borders is completely sovereign in air and in sea and in land.”<sup>65</sup>

These declarations are seen as encouraging by some political observers within Israel; others remain more skeptical and point out that accepting an *interim* two-state solution is very different from relinquishing all outstanding claims and recognizing the end of the conflict. Based on these contrasting assessments, there is an ongoing policy and scholarly debate within Israel on whether the political rise of the Muslim Brotherhood will help to moderate, rather than radicalize, Hamas. This second theory has been at least partially validated following the last outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Hamas in November 2012. On that occasion, Egypt played an important role in diffusing the conflict and bringing the parties to agree to a ceasefire.

In this context of deliberate ambiguity and Israeli anxiety over the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, Israel has been preoccupied with the Egyptian Presidential elections and with the victory of Muslim

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<sup>63</sup> "Senior Egyptian Politician Rejects Peace Between Egypt, Israel," *Fars News Agency*, December 28, 2011. <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9007279262>

<sup>64</sup> "Politician: US, Israel, S. Arabia Trying to Block Resumption of Iran-Egypt Ties," *Fars News Agency*, July 13, 2011, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9004221052>; "Egypt's Leading Political Party Stresses Improving Ties with Iran," *Fars News Agency*, December 18, 2011. <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9007277804>

<sup>65</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick; Mayy el Sheikh, "Islamist Victors In Egypt Seeking Shift By Hamas," *New York Times*, March 24, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/24/world/middleeast/egypts-election-victors-seek-shift-by-hamas-to-press-israel.html?pagewanted=all>

Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi, who was largely perceived as far more antagonistic to Israel than its rival, Ahmed Shafik.<sup>66</sup>

But regardless of the rise of the Brotherhood in institutional politics, Israel's policy with respect to Egypt will have to adjust to a different political arena. Clearly, the new bilateral relationship will not be forged only with the new political establishment and the army, but—for the first time—public opinion will also have a say in how the relationship continues. At the moment, this represents more of a threat than an opportunity to Israel, given that over half of the Egyptian population appears to favor annulling the peace treaty with Israel, while 85 percent view Israel negatively.<sup>67</sup>

As a result, Israel's policy toward Egypt in the short-term likely will be “minimalist,” focusing on preserving the peace treaty while beefing up security at its own border. Other more ambitious goals, like improving ties and reopening the “normalization” chapter, appear less realistic and will likely be shelved.

And indeed, this is in line with Israel's policy so far with respect to the Arab Spring. The country first chose to keep a low profile when responding to the shifting regional dynamics. This choice was the result of two considerations. First, Israel—aware of its own unpopularity in the Middle East—wanted to stress that it would not interfere with local political processes. Secondly, the country truly lacked the political and diplomatic tools to have a direct impact, thus acting as an outsider.

In this sense the policies adopted have been largely passive, more focused on maintaining the peace treaties—both with Egypt as well as with Jordan—while postponing more ambitious political goals.

Within Israel, much debate has taken place on whether such a “passive” approach should be supplemented with a more active component. For instance, several Israeli political observers argue that to improve its regional standing in the “new” Middle East, Israel needs to revive the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Specifically, Israel needs to “to ease the burden on the residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and inter alia, to reach understandings with Hamas (...) and withdraw its objection in principle to a thaw in relations between Fatah and Hamas (...).”<sup>68</sup> Progress in the Israeli-Palestinian arena and committing to review the West Bank issue is then seen as crucial to help Israel's standing in the region. In other words, in addition to responding to the Arab Spring by investing in security and beefing up the borders, there is much debate within Israel on how to adopt a more proactive political stance.

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<sup>66</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick; Isabel Kershner, "Israel Is Anxiously Watching Egyptian Vote," *New York Times*, May 26, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/26/world/middleeast/israel-anxiously-watches-egyptian-election.html>

<sup>67</sup> Oren Kessler, "Analysis: Unrest Mars Egypt Army's Sterling Image," *Jerusalem Post*, November 24, 2011. <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=246767>; Oren Kessler, "Sleepless in Jerusalem," *Foreign Policy*, May 24, 2012. [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/05/24/the\\_view\\_from\\_jerusalem](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/05/24/the_view_from_jerusalem)

<sup>68</sup> Anat Kurz, "The Arab Spring and the Israeli-Palestinian Arena," in *One Year of the Arab Spring: Global and Regional Implications*, Guzansky, Yoel and Heller, Mark A., eds. (INSS Memorandum No. 113, Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, March 2012), p. 69.

The current policy on Syria faces the same debate, with the political arena divided. On the one hand, many affirm that Israel cannot do anything beyond providing humanitarian assistance. On the other, some political observers argue that the country should either provide safe haven to Syrian refugees, share intelligence on the Syrian regime with the world, or even covertly offer to help the opposition. However, at the moment, the policy on Syria has largely remained passive' fearing that direct involvement would backlash on Israel while also hurting the stand of the anti-Assad opposition.

### **Israel and the Arab Spring—Reactions and Policies**

Since the Arab Spring first began in Tunisia in December 2010, a process of rapid social and political transformation has been occurring within the Middle East. In the cases of Egypt and Tunisia, the initial protests led to a mostly nonviolent regime change and to the demise of old authoritarian regimes. In other cases, like in Libya, the collapse of the old government came as a result of a bloody internal war.

And still the turmoil is not over. There are several countries in the region—from Syria to Bahrain—where the anti-regime protests are still in full swing. And even in countries where the Arab Spring has not “arrived” full force—like Lebanon or Jordan—the impact of the ongoing regional transformations can be felt locally. In other words, since December 2010, the political ground has been shaking in the entire region.

In this context, Israel has been following the ongoing political dynamics with a mix of hope and fear. From an Israeli perspective, the Arab Spring can be seen as a potential threat: both the increased volatility of the region and the rise of political Islam are in fact perceived as worrisome trends. At the same time, however, the ongoing social and political transformations could represent an opportunity for the country to begin a new, more positive, chapter in its regional relations—especially if the democratization processes succeed and result in the creation of more open and pluralistic countries. However, although Israel believes that “democracies do not go at war with each other” and that a more free and democratic Middle East can indeed be an asset, still there is widespread skepticism toward the capacity of the Arab Spring to deliver such results.

Looking specifically at Egypt, the consensus seems to be that things will likely get worse before they get better. This impression is fueled by the souring of the diplomatic, economic, and political relations with Egypt since the collapse of the Mubarak regime, as well as by the unequivocal rise of Islamist parties—like the Muslim Brotherhood—who have adopted openly anti-Israel stances. In addition, the negative feelings the Egyptian public opinion holds against Israel further indicate that the state of the bilateral relations may continue to deteriorate in the coming months.

These mixed feelings have resulted in an ambivalent posture toward the ongoing regional transformation. Israel has largely attempted to weather the storm produced by the uprisings. At the moment, the priorities are preserving the existing peace treaties with both Jordan and Egypt, while focusing on investing on border security. In the longer term, there is a debate within the Israeli

society over what steps—starting with committing to deliver concrete progress in the Israeli-Palestinian arena—the country needs to take to adopt a more proactive attitude and improve its regional standing.



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