

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.¹ Gerges allows, however, that latent cultural hostility towards Islam occasionally intrudes on the policymaking process, particularly via elected representatives in Congress.² Maria de Ceu Pinto largely agrees with the "clash of interests"—based

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

² 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.³ 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.⁴

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.”⁵

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.⁶ 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.⁷ This suggests that if

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

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

⁴ 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.

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

⁶ 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).

⁷ 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.⁸

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.⁹

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."¹⁰

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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>

¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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

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

¹² 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 Yaquob, *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.”¹³ 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.”¹⁴

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.”¹⁵ 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[...].”¹⁶

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.”¹⁷ 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

¹³ 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).

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

¹⁵ 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.

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

¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

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.¹⁹ 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."²⁰

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

¹⁸ 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.

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

²⁰ 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.”²¹

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.”²²

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.²³ 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.”²⁴ However, Djerejian did not specify how

²¹ 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).

²² 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.

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

²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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."²⁶ 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.²⁷ This left Islamist groups with two options to win Washington's official favor: cease to be Islamic, or retreat into political quietism.²⁸

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.²⁹ 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

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. 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.

²⁵ 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. See also Bill Clinton, "Remarks at the 48th 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>.

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

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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.³¹ 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.”³²

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.”³³

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.³⁴ French scholar of Islam Gilles Kepel largely concurs.³⁵ 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

³⁰ 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.

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

³² 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.

³³ 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.

³⁴ 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.

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

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

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.³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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.”⁴¹

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

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

³⁷ 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>.

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

³⁹ 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>.

⁴⁰ Some evidence suggests that there was dissension 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>

⁴¹ “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."⁴² 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."⁴³

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."⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵

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."⁴⁶ Another part of the strategy included creating an official English-language website, 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

⁴² 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.

⁴³ 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>

⁴⁴ 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.

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

⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ 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).⁴⁸ 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."⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰ 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

⁴⁷ 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>.

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

⁴⁹ 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. 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>.

⁵⁰ 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.”⁵¹ 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.⁵² 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*⁵³

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.⁵⁴

⁵¹ 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>.

⁵² 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).

⁵³ 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.

⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ 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."⁵⁶ For Graham Fuller, a former CIA official, the Brotherhood "is the preeminent movement in the Muslim world."⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸

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).⁵⁹ 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

online at 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

⁵⁵ 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.

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

⁵⁷ 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>

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

⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰ These arguments are supported by Mona El-Ghobashy's more academic take on ideological and organizational change in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.⁶¹

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."⁶² In a later piece, Hamid and Brooke explicitly connect democracy promotion, engagement with Islamists, and marginalization of jihadists.⁶³

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

⁶⁰ 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>

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

⁶² 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)

⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵ 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."⁶⁶

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

⁶⁴ 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.

⁶⁵ 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>

⁶⁶ "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.”⁶⁷ 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.”⁶⁸

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.”⁶⁹ 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.”⁷⁰

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

⁶⁷ 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>.

⁶⁸ 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/>.

⁶⁹ 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).

⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹

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.”⁷²

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.”⁷³ Despite Islamist attempts to separate themselves—in both word and deed—from their violent counterparts, the regimes persisted in making the connection.⁷⁴

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

⁷¹ 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.

⁷² 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.”

⁷³ 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>

⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵ 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."⁷⁶

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."⁷⁷ 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.⁷⁸ Even as protests roiled Tahrir square, Mubarak insisted to U.S. officials that they were the work of the Brotherhood and Iran.⁷⁹

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.⁸⁰ As with the Arab regimes, Israeli officials have tried to tie Israel's ongoing struggle against terrorism with the terrorism facing the United States.⁸¹

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

⁷⁶ 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>

⁷⁷ 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>

⁷⁸ "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>

⁷⁹ 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.

⁸⁰ 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

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>.

⁸¹ 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.⁸² 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."⁸³ 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."⁸⁴ 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."⁸⁵

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."⁸⁶ This passage, according to *Washington Post* journalist David Ignatius, was

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>.

⁸² 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

⁸³ 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.

⁸⁴ 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.

⁸⁵ "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>

⁸⁶ "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.⁸⁷ In stark contrast to the previous Administration, the Obama Administration invited ten members of the Brotherhood’s parliamentary bloc to the speech.⁸⁸

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.”⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰

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.”⁹¹ 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.”⁹²

⁸⁷ 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. 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.

⁸⁸ 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/>

⁸⁹ “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>

⁹⁰ “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>

⁹¹ 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.

⁹² 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.⁹³

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.”⁹⁴

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.”⁹⁵ 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.⁹⁶

⁹³ Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*.

⁹⁴ 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>

⁹⁵ 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.

⁹⁶ 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[...]."⁹⁷

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."⁹⁸

Despite Clinton's statements, high-level contact between the Brotherhood and senior U.S. officials did not materialize until after Egypt's parliamentary elections.⁹⁹ 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.¹⁰⁰

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

⁹⁷ 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>

⁹⁸ "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>

⁹⁹ 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>

¹⁰⁰ 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.¹⁰¹ 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.”¹⁰² A *CNN* story took a similar line, suggesting that the visit was orchestrated as “a global goodwill tour to soften the group’s image.”¹⁰³

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.”¹⁰⁴

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

¹⁰¹ 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>

¹⁰² 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/gIQAqqs1tS_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.

¹⁰³ 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/>

¹⁰⁴ 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."¹⁰⁵

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."¹⁰⁶

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.¹⁰⁷ Ending the treaty remains a risky option for Egypt, economically,

¹⁰⁵ 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.

¹⁰⁶ 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)).

¹⁰⁷ "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.¹⁰⁸ 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.¹⁰⁹ 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.

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.

¹⁰⁸ 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.

¹⁰⁹ 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>.