

France and Islamist Movements: A Long Non-dialogue

By Jean-François Daguzan

France has a unique relationship with Arab countries and particularly with North African (Maghreb) states. To maintain influence and strong economic links with these countries since their independence, France was obligated to develop a policy of compromise with former colonized states or policy/economy linked countries in the Near-East. What the analysts called “*politique arabe de la France*” (Arab French Policy) aimed essentially to preserve the interests of France on the Southern and Eastern shore of the Mediterranean. This approach forced France to adapt its strategy to the *desideratas* and good will of Arab leaders, most of which have controlled these countries during the last 30 to 40 years. For these reasons, French governments have had significant difficulties engaging officially, and sometimes even informally, with the various political oppositions (except Libya during the war for Chad and the special case of the Lebanese civil war).

On the other hand, France has a unique specificity in having welcomed the largest Arab community in Europe. This situation makes France ultra-sensitive to any political or diplomatic development in the Mediterranean zone and the Arab world in general. The globalization of communication (through the Internet and satellite TV) increases this situation. In fact, the rise of Islamist movements was considered a serious problem for the stability of France, as well as a potential threat during the Algeria civil war (1992-1998). This article aims to explain the specific situation that makes France/Arab-Muslim relationship exceptional.

The Obsession of Permanence and Exemplarity

Since their independence, France established a special relationship with Maghreb countries and a very special one with Algeria.¹ As a matter of fact, France wished to appear not as the former colonizer but as the “godfather,” the close friend of each country which tacitly refused to interfere in internal affairs (including human rights); it was the post-colonial unwritten pact. The case of Algeria is different and more sensitive. To make the decolonization achieved by the Algerian people a success, France decided to transform the independence of Algeria into a model of co-operation. Significant monies were invested; training and education were given by French professors until 1975 and the energy policy was based on the principle of exemplarity for the rest of the world. To make the “Algerian dream” possible, compromises were necessary and inescapable.

¹ “France and the Maghreb, the end of the special relationship?” in Yahia H. Zoubir & Haizam Amirah-Fernandez (Eds.), *North Africa, Politics, Region and the limits of transformation* (Routledge, London, 2008), pp. 331-347.

For instance, when the Algerian dissident Ali Mecili was killed in France—certainly by the Algerian intelligence service—in 1987, no official condemnation came from Paris.² Consequently France had to manage this relationship this way:

The question of interference is in the heart of this special relationship and makes any French action or declaration highly risky for bilateral links. This could explain the paranoid behaviour sometimes quoted by Euro-member States during some political discussions and the definition of a common position regarding Maghreb countries, and especially Algeria.³

Naturally, the presence in France of a large and long-established Maghreb minority contributes to this unusual situation. A Muslim community existed in France from the end of the nineteenth century (10,000 in 1895). But this community grew slowly during the first part of the twentieth century, notably with World War I (132,000 in 1918—200,000 in 1920⁴) and exploded when more manpower was needed to rebuild the country after War World II. The post war years brought a period of incredible economic growth, as well. After 1974, the “*regroupement familial*” (family bringing up together), authorized by the French government, welcomed migrant workers' wives and children to join, swelling the population.

Ethnic statistics are forbidden in France. As a consequence, the unofficial result obtained by various researchers or political organizations varies depending on how statistics are gathered—if the account integrates Arabs only or Muslims with French nationality, illegal immigration, or with the user's political purposes. Therefore, the size of the Arab/Muslim community could vary from 4 to 7 million without any guarantee of reliability.⁵ In France, the sole official reference (by nationality of origin) available indicates that Tunisian community reached 234,669 persons, Algerians 713,334 and Moroccans 653,826.⁶ Yet every count has to be questioned. The researcher Michèle Tribalat estimated the number of Muslims in 2005 through their “lineage” on three generations at 4.5 million.⁷ On the other hand, the Pew Research Center estimated the number in 2010 to be 3,574

² See, Hocine Ait Ahmed, *L’Affaire Mecili, La découverte*, coll. Poche, Paris, 2007, rééd. (1^{re} éd. 1989) – introduction, p. V

³ “France, Democratization and North Africa,” in *Democratization*, Special issue: “The European Union and Democracy Promotion: The Case of North Africa,” Richard Gillespie and Richard Young (eds.) Spring 2002, pp. 135-149. Also published as *The European Union and Democracy Promotion: The Case of North Africa*, Richard Gillespie and Richard Young (eds.), (London/Portland OR: Frank Cass, 2002), p. 136.

See also, Claire Spencer, “Algeria: France’s disarray and Europe conundrum,” in B.A. Roberson, *The Middle East and Europe* (Routledge, New York and London, 1998), pp. 170-184.

⁴ Kamel Kateb, De l'étranger à l'immigré, et de l'ethnique au religieux : les chiffres en question ? , in Yves Charles Zarka (dir.), Sylvie Taussig (dir.) et Cynthia Fleury (dir.), *L’islam en France*, Paris, PUF, coll. Cités (no Hors-série), October, 2e éd. (1^{re} éd. 2004), Quadriges, p. 732. (ISBN 978-2-13-055727-2), p. 38

⁵ Former Minister of Interior Claude Guéant in Newspaper *Le Monde* , interview April 4, 2011, La loi de 1905 ne sera pas modifiée, http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2011/04/04/le-nombre-de-musulmans-en-france-pose-probleme-selon-gueant_1502928_3224.html

⁶ Répartition des immigrés par pays de naissance 2008, Insee, October 2011.

⁷ Michèle Tribalat: "L'islam reste une menace," *Le Monde*, October 13, 2011

million, representing 5.7 percent of the population.(In second place is Italy with an estimated 1,583 million Muslims.)⁸

Given these statistics, it is understandable why French authorities, during the last 30 years have had a growing concern about Islamic affairs. Obviously, the Arab community has always had a strong concern about the developments on the Eastern and Western side of the Mediterranean, although the situation varies, depending of the size of the community from the various countries.

The question of Islam in France

For many years, the question of Islam in France was linked to the permanent relation/dispute with Algeria. The situation concerned the control of the Paris Mosque and the appointment of its Rector. But since the middle of the 1980s, Algerian influence diminished, in spite of the presence of the extremely talented Rector Daril Boubakeur, hurriedly called in to rescue a weakened institution. Over the last 20 years the fundamentalist movements financed by Saudi Arabia and other proselytizing organizations, such as the Pakistani *Tabligh* or the Muslim Brotherhood (with the powerful *Union of French Islamic Organizations* or UOIF⁹), have found a genuine echo among populations with an identity crisis and bearing the brunt of economic crisis. Black African populations, in particular, are participating in this movement and are not interested in the Maghreb “minaret wars.” For its part, the Moroccan king is doing his best to keep control of a community more closely-knit than others, but here also the limits of this strategy are becoming increasingly evident, as demonstrated by an intensifying radical agenda in that country.¹⁰ Both for political and geopolitical reasons, the situation evolved along these lines.

The Algerian Civil War and the Consequence on the French Perception

During the 1960s and the 1970s, Arab militancy in France was essentially linked to the Palestine/Lebanese conundrum. With the Lebanese civil war, after 1975, and the Iran dispute in the reimbursement of the Eurodif loan,¹¹ France suffered terrorism but it was considered to be caused largely by foreign policy issues.

Certainly France progressively observed political Islam’s growing influence in Arab societies, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Middle East and emerging political parties and

⁸ *Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Pew Forum Report, 2010.*

<http://features.pewforum.org/muslim/number-of-muslims-in-western-europe.html>

⁹ *Union des organisations islamiques de France*, See Michèle Tribalat, Principaux courants et associations de l’Islam français, *CEMOTI*, n33 2002, pp. 39-42.

¹⁰ “France, Democratization and North Africa,” in *Democratization*, Special issue: “The European Union and Democracy Promotion: The Case of North Africa”, Richard Gillespie and Richard Young (eds.) Spring 2002, pp. 135-149. Also published as: *The European Union and Democracy Promotion: The Case of North Africa*, op. cit., pp. 136.

¹¹ During the Sha period, France received a significant loan from the Iranian government to create a civil nuclear energy in Iran. With the disappearance of the regime, French governments decided not to reimburse the Mollah regime. The Iranians decided to threaten France with terrorism to obtain the payment.

movements in Maghreb countries since the 1980s. But these movements were globally perceived as a response to the non-democratic situation in each country. In addition, France was confident about of each government's ability to control and eventually to dismantle these groups (for example, repression in Egypt after President Sadat's assassination, and the massacres of Homs and Hama in Syria).

France realized the power of Islamist movements with the Algerian civil war and the end of the democratic process in this country (1992). From the French perspective, the first stage of these events was anxious questioning. How to deal with the rupture of the democratic process? Are Islamist leaders reliable and acceptable interlocutors? The political period of "cohabitation"—in other words, the conjunction of a President, François Mitterrand, from the Socialist party and a government from the right wing—led the French position on the issue to a long period of uncertainty. Specifically, a part of the French political class proposed engaging in discussion with Islamists in order to preserve the long-term French interest in case of an Islamist victory in Algeria; others opposed such a view. For instance, the conference of Sant'Egidio in Roma (January 13, 1995) organized by an informal arm of the Vatican and attended by various Algerian political forces, including Islamist leaders, were viewed cautiously by French political circles.

But Algerian Islamists ended the suspense by attacking France in 1995, first by killing a respected French-Algerian imam, Abdelbaki Sahraoui in Paris, then by twice bombing the metro and the train system and killing many French citizens living or working in Algeria.

These events forced French authorities to tackle seriously the issue of political Islam, first by implementing a large survey of radical mosques and preachers, then by deporting what they considered the most dangerous foreign preachers living in the country, and finally by engaging in a close cooperation with the Maghreb intelligence services.

The Difficulty in Tackling the Question of Islam in France

During the last 30 years, the attempts to manage Islam in France by the various French governments were always complicated and globally unsuccessful. With the first crisis in French *Banlieues* (boroughs) and the spread of violent acts of racism, the socialist governments were very disturbed by religious issues and dreaded entering a controversial religious debate about Islam. They tried to develop a concept of coexistence of community in the boroughs by respecting the differences and religions. The so called "*touche pas à mon pote!*" movement ("Don't touch my buddy!") started by socialists (essentially the youth) was successful when launched but criticized by other right and left republicans defending the old French concept of "laïcité" (secularism) and combating any form of communitarianism **[communitarianism?]**. Finally, the concept declined and progressively disappeared.

After years of hesitations between various governments, the then Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy decided to create the French council of Muslim faiths (*Conseil français du culte musulman* - CFCM), and organized the elections and the structure of the CFCM, **imitating?** the Representative

Council of Jewish Institutions of France (*Conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France* – CRIF). The election of Daril Boubakeur as President of CCFM was achieved with great difficulty and marked the sharp decline of traditional forces in favor of new and more radical organizations.¹² Sarkozy chose to support the influence of UOIF, a very conservative Islamic organization close to the Muslim Brotherhood.¹³ This group was seen by Sarkozy’s advisors as something “like an Islamic Communist Party, very structured and fond of order.”¹⁴ In reality, the situation was not this clear. The main lesson is the partial “de-Algerianisation” and progressively “de-maghrebisation” of Islam in France with the growing influence of African and Asian movements.

Islam in France covers a palette running from a “soft” African *Marabout*, Islamic *Salafism*, to the secular Muslims who are beginning to make themselves heard. Samir Amghar notes: “The French Islamic connection covers a wide spectrum of social practice and a plurality of religiosities which runs from a cultural relationship with the Muslim religion to more demanding religious forms.”¹⁵ This does not necessarily imply that the link with the country of origin is weakening: The need to “return to the village” for holidays, or to be buried there, remains very strong in all generations. But we are probably moving in time toward an “Italian” or “Spanish” attitude, in which the link with the country of origin is of a sentimental and family historical nature and that alone.¹⁶

From the government’s perspective, this “French Islam” would find its path between a French way which is struggling to emerge amid a power struggle which has little to do with religion and the various siren calls of active fundamentalism.¹⁷ The second set of elections for the CFCM in June 2005 confirmed this basic tendency, as well as the decline of the Paris Mosque. It also illustrated the growing Moroccan influence on the French Muslim community with the reinforcement of the national federation of French Muslims (*Fédération nationale des Musulmans de France*- FNMF). In fact, after the terrorist attacks in Casablanca (2003) and the related growth of jihadist tendencies in the country and in the Moroccan diaspora, the Moroccan government determined to strongly reinforce its control over Moroccan Islam. In 2006 the *Rassemblement des Musulmans de France* (RMF, build on the ruins of FNMF) emerged and quickly took the lead on the CFCM, electing its leader, M. Moussaoui, as president in 2008. Morocco finally took control of the CFCM over the Muslim Brotherhood-leaning UOIF. Recognizing this fact, Paris eventually negotiated with Rabat [**explain Rabat**].¹⁸ Finally, the “*Islam de France*” project, conceived to create a French movement, independent from outside, failed due to hard geopolitical trends. At present, Morocco, Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Muslim Brotherhood continue to influence Islam in France.

¹² Défaite de la Mosquée de Paris au Scrutin pour le Conseil Musulman, *Le Monde* April 14, 2003.

¹³ [La face cachée de l’UOIF \(entretien avec Fiammetta Venner\)](http://www.lexpress.fr), *lexpress.fr*, May 2, 2005

¹⁴ <http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/01012400567-islam-le-trouble-jeu-de-nicolas-sarkozy>

¹⁵ Les nouvelles voies de l’Islam de France, (report Islam de France) *Maghreb-Machrek*, Spring 2005, p. 11.

¹⁶ “France and the Maghreb, the end of the special relationship?”, in Yahia H. Zoubir & Haizam Amirah-Fernandez (Eds.), *North Africa, Politics, Region and the limits of transformation*, op. cit., p. 333.

¹⁷ Catherine Coroller, Le Conseil du Culte Musulman ensablé dans ses courants, *Liberation*, September 8, 2005, p.15.

¹⁸ <http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/01012400567-islam-le-trouble-jeu-de-nicolas-sarkozy>

The Sarkozy period was very interesting in this regard. As Minister of Interior, he struggled against radical Islam—for example, confronting the famous Islamist philosopher Tariq Ramadan in a TV debate. But, on the other hand, Sarkozy decided to structure Islam in France by creating a “French Islam” or “Islam from France,” to favor the rising of a national array of Imams and Islamic studies. Moreover he tried to structure the Muslim national landscape by creating an organism of dialogue supposed to be the link between the State and the Muslim community. From his position as Minister of Interior to the first years of his Presidency, Nicolas Sarkozy developed a concept of “positive Secularism.” This idea challenged the old French concept of “*Laïcité*” (Secularism) built by the end of the nineteenth century to insure the neutrality of the Republic vis-à-vis clerical powers (essentially the Catholic Church). The new concept aimed to give a more important role to religion in the defense and propagation of values and virtues in the French society and, most notably, in the areas where Muslims communities are large. Sarkozy also defended the concept of multiculturalism. Inspired by the Anglo-Saxon model, the “*multiculturalisme à la française*” wanted to defend the ethnic or religious specificities of communities living with their own cultural rules.¹⁹

During the first years of his presidency, Sarkozy continued to have positive attitudes toward religious values and to defend multiculturalist concepts. He aimed to nominate a Muslim Prefect to symbolize the change and to advise on integration. Abderrahmane Dahmane sought to create a “Council for diversity.” But over the last two years, his position changed dramatically. Sarkozy considered immigration a threat against the identity and the stability of France and Europe. Then during the 2012 presidency campaign he adopted a hard line affirming the end of multiculturalism: “It is a failure. The truth is that our democracies are too preoccupied by the identity of the person arriving but not enough by the identity of the country welcoming. [...] if somebody enters France he has to fusion with only one national community.”²⁰

During the 2012 campaign, France’s new President François Hollande took a different position. He first advocated for the principle of Secularism (*Laïcité*), expressing his wish to include it into the Constitution. “I shall propose,” he stated, “to write the fundamental principles from the 1905 law on Secularism in the Constitution by including at Article 1st a second point so following: The Republic insures the freedom of conscience, guarantees the free practice of cults and respects the separation between Churches and the State.” (Candidate program point 40)²¹ He also defended the principle of a legal immigration:

¹⁹ <http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/01012400567-islam-le-trouble-jeu-de-nicolas-sarkozy>

²⁰ « *C'est un échec. La vérité c'est que dans toutes nos démocraties, on s'est trop préoccupé de l'identité de celui qui arrivait et pas assez de l'identité du pays qui accueillait* , » [disait-il](#) lors de l'émission « *Paroles de Français* », la semaine dernière sur TF1. « *Si on vient en France, on accepte de se fondre dans une seule communauté, qui est la communauté nationale ;* » <http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/01012400567-islam-le-trouble-jeu-de-nicolas-sarkozy>

²¹ Je proposerai d'inscrire les principes fondamentaux de la loi de 1905 sur la laïcité dans la Constitution en insérant, à l'article 1er, un deuxième alinéa ainsi rédigé : « La République assure la liberté de conscience, garantit le libre exercice des cultes et respecte la séparation des Églises et de l'État,(40) <http://fh2012.francoishollande.fr/les-60-engagements-du-projet/>

“I shall give the right to vote in local elections to foreigners legally living in France since five years. I shall lead a merciless struggle against illegal immigration and the clandestine work networks. I shall secure the lawful immigration.”²²

On the opposite end of the political spectrum, the *Front National* (National Front) extreme right political party continues to capitalize on the anti-Muslim trend. When this party strongly emerged in the early 1980s, it immediately settled on the immigration question and tried to manipulate the disappointment and alienation felt by many French toward the political class by designing a scapegoat (“*bouc émissaire*”): the foreigners Arab, African and Muslim. The party was also strongly anti-Semitic due to its old roots. More recently, under Marine Le Pen’s leadership (the party’s founder’s daughter) the *Front National* slowly lost its anti-Semitic habits to concentrate on the Muslim and immigration issues. From 2010, Mrs. Le Pen adopted a very anti-Muslim position which will find an echo in the classical Right. For example, during the 2012 presidential campaign she exploited a controversy over the question of ritual *halal* meat in the French slaughterhouses.

How to Deal with Political Islam Abroad?

When the Tunisian revolution began, the French Tunisian community was extremely taken [back?] by the events. Many Tunisian political refugees lived in France, and some French Tunisians feared for their families. But the hate against Ben Ali and his acolytes was significant. Young business leaders working in France—most of them holding two nationalities—engaged with the media to defend the Tunisian people. Most of the Tunisian community did not understand the French government’s silence during the revolution. When the boats full of Tunisian refugees came into Europe through the Italian island of Lampedusa (approximately 20,000)—most of them seeking to reach France but blocked by the French government—the outrage broke out. The French position was considered insufferable by the Tunisian public and by the French Tunisian community, which expressed it through public manifestations and blog bashing.

In Morocco, the diaspora community anxiously followed the riots appearing in many cities (Oujda, Tangiers, etc.) But the capacity of the *Mabzen* (the King's administration) to control the situation re-oriented the expectations of the public opinion and the diaspora community (MRE, *Marocains résidents à l'étranger*) toward a rapid constitutional change. Then the diaspora largely approved the reform process when King Mohammed VI proposed a new constitution. The referendum of the first of July 2011 gave a 98 percent approval for a semi-constitutional monarchy.²³

²² J'accorderai le droit de vote aux élections locales aux étrangers résidant légalement en France depuis cinq ans. Je conduirai une lutte implacable contre l'immigration illégale et les filières du travail clandestin. Je sécuriserai l'immigration légale. (50) <http://fh2012.francoishollande.fr/les-60-engagements-du-projet>

²³ Number of vote from Moroccans outside; 269646 Bulletins nuls: 2494; Voix exprimées: 267152, Agence Maghreb Arabe Presse - 2011, Le Conseil constitutionnel annonce officiellement du projet de Constitution, <http://www.map.ma/mapfr/resultats-fr.pdf>

The “Arab Spring”: France Face to the “Dark Scenario”

The events of September 11, 2001 increased the anxiousness of the French government and population toward Islamism. From this date, the struggle against terrorism tended to structure relations between France and the Maghreb as it did those between the United States and the Arab world. Consequently, this situation reinforced the positive bias, *prejudice*, for dictatorship seen as the wall against Jihadism and al Qaeda.

The rapid spread of the Arab Spring left European chancelleries disoriented. When the revolution occurred in Tunisia in mid-December 2010, the French government was incapable to respond to the event, letting the United-States support the insurrection and pressure for the fall of the dictator.

The downfall of Ben Ali and Mubarak completely shocked the French establishment. French authorities considered the fall of the old dictators impossible. Consequently, the government mixed a careful silence (until the ultimate flight of Ben Ali) and personal mistakes from various ministries (for example Foreign Minister Michelle Alliot-Marie going on holidays during the Tunisian riots with a private jet offered by a close relative of the Ben Ali family and buying a luxury flat for the minister’s parents, as well as the Minister of Culture Frédéric Mitterrand, assuring that Tunisia was not absolutely a dictatorship).²⁴ These mistakes were disastrously interpreted by the Tunisian community in France.

Finally, President Sarkozy decided to revamp his image within Arab public opinion. When the Libya upheaval occurred he advocated, on the suggestion of the French activist/philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy, military support of the Benghazi rebels. The choice was wise. From 1945 on, Libya never was a stake for France. The 1970s honeymoon engaged by the Pompidou presidency and essentially marked by huge military deals was rapidly followed by the war for Chad. This unnamed war ended with the defeat of Libyan forces in the mid-1980s. Then the situation remained frozen until the Libyans renounced the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in 2003. The attempt to create a special relationship between Sarkozy and Gaddafi failed with the Libyan dictator's unsuccessful visit to Paris in December 2007. The French government considered engaging militarily Gaddafi’s forces, a low political and geostrategic risk. The support of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, as well as the Arab League, made the military intervention possible despite the opposition of countries such as Algeria and Syria.

Once the Libyan war ended, the French doctrine *via-a-vis* the Arab Spring was officially to accept the change it entailed and to recognize the result of the polls whatever they might be.

President Sarkozy’s last declaration, by former Ministry of Foreign Affairs Alain Juppé, and the Spokesperson of the Ministry, were very clear. The general message was to accept all results coming

²⁴ “There is a political opposition which speaks not absolutely as we do in Europe. But to affirm that Tunisia is an one voice dictature, as said so often, seems to me exaggerated.” http://archives-lepost.huffingtonpost.fr/article/2011/01/10/2366147_frederic-mitterrand-dire-que-la-tunisie-est-une-dictature-univoque-me-semble-exagere.html

from fair and reliable elections. The second was to assume to have been surprised by the upheavals but no more than others countries (an excuse not really acceptable from a government disposing all means of analysis and intelligence!).

President Sarkozy: “We have been criticized too regarding the Arab spring. Did we take too much time to understand what was happening, notably in Tunisia? Surely. Did we underestimate the exasperation of peoples against these authoritarian regimes and moreover their deep desire for freedom and democracy? Yes, I think so. At last, in name of stability, did we become too complacent vis-à-vis these oppressive and corrupt regimes? Absolutely!

But it would be honest to say this Arab spring surprised everybody and first those who did it. I add that in the Tunisian case, the ancient colonial power which is France was in very special position which exposed it more than others to a trial for interference. But, once more, France was capable to engage this great event for freedom which crossed over the Arab world, by proposing to accompany the development of democracy and economy in the framework of the Deauville Partnership, adopted by the G8 Summit under the French Presidency.²⁵

Alain Juppé: “Everybody knows that history could reserve deceptions or surprises. And we are all determined to be vigilant in order to make the new governments capable to stay reliable to values on the basis of which they have been elected and respect the rules of democratic life. But I don’t see on which reasons we could refuse these people so many times gagged the right to express their choices. Regarding what happened in many countries, India, Latin America or Europe I do not see the reasons which will forbid not to be copied in Arab countries.”²⁶

“The Arab spring is an incredible stake for the future. As in every gamble, it produces incertitude and risks.”²⁷

²⁵ » On nous a aussi critiqués à propos des «printemps arabes». Avons-nous mis trop de temps à prendre la mesure de ce qui se passait, notamment en Tunisie ? Sûrement. Avons-nous sous-estimé l'exaspération de ces peuples contre ces régimes autoritaires et, surtout, leur profond désir de liberté et de démocratie ? Oui, je le crois. Enfin, au nom de la stabilité, avons-nous fait preuve de trop de complaisance vis-à-vis de ces régimes oppressifs et corrompus ? Sans doute. Mais il faut avoir l'honnêteté de dire que ces printemps arabes ont surpris tout le monde, à commencer par ceux qui les ont faits. J'ajoute que, dans le cas tunisien, l'ancienne puissance coloniale qu'est la France se trouvait dans une position particulière, qui l'exposait plus que d'autres à un procès en ingérence. Mais, une fois de plus, la France a su prendre la mesure de ce grand mouvement en faveur de la liberté qui a balayé le monde arabe, en proposant d'accompagner le développement de la démocratie et de l'économie de ces pays dans le cadre du Partenariat de Deauville adopté lors du Sommet du G8 sous Présidence française ». 36/341 05/02/2012 - Paris - Interview, [Entretien du président de la République, Nicolas Sarkozy, avec la revue "Politique Internationale" : extraits.](#)

²⁶ Le «printemps arabe» est un formidable pari sur l'avenir. Comme tous les paris, il comporte des incertitudes et des risques. 62/341 15/12/2011 - Tripoli - Discours, Déplacement en Libye : intervention du ministre d'Etat, ministre des Affaires étrangères et européennes, Alain Juppé, à l'université de Tripoli.

²⁷ Juppé : « Nous savons tous que l'histoire peut réserver des déceptions ou des surprises. Et nous sommes tous déterminés à faire preuve de vigilance pour que les nouveaux gouvernements restent fidèles aux valeurs pour lesquelles ils ont été élus et respectent les règles de la vie démocratique. Mais je ne vois pas au nom de

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson: “The Minister of State will recall the essential role of United Nations to support all solutions to respond to people’s hope for freedom, respect of Human Rights and democracy. Moreover, he will recall our engagement without restrictions in these movements, which are both legitimate and irrepressible, and will strive to convince all our partners to act this way.”²⁸

Journalist regarding Egypt: “Have you some contacts with official people or activists?”

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson: “With everybody. Many criticize the French Diplomacy as others because at the beginning of the Arab Springs we only spoke with some people. M. Alain Juppé gave an instruction: we must speak with everybody. Our embassies do it in each country in the Arab world and more especially in Egypt.”²⁹

Action and Repentance: the Last French Strategy

The Syrian upheaval is an important development. When the first protests took place in Derah, the French government remained extremely cautious. Syria was not Libya and the destabilization of this country would bring strategic consequences to the neighborhood (Lebanon and Israël first). And the links with Iran would imply an overall tension throughout the Middle East. But rapidly the dramatic and uncontrolled repression of the Syrian government forced the international community to strongly react. France chose the most-anti-Al-Assad position, suggesting the Syrian President leave and supporting the *Transition Syrian Council* (organism representing every stream of the Syrian opposition). At the international level, France strongly supported a group of 70 nations named the international conference of Friends of Syria (simplified by “the Friends of Syria”) including countries such as United States, Canada, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Morocco. The group is very active, pushing for a democratic transition after the departure of the Baath/Alaoui power from Syria. Later France supported the Kofi Annan mission to Syria but without real expectations for success. Moreover, for the first time, France has evoked the use of force under the chapter VII of

quoi nous pourrions refuser à des peuples dont la voix a été si longtemps étouffée le droit d’exprimer leur choix. Je ne vois pas au nom de quoi ce qui s’est passé dans tant de pays, en Inde, en Amérique latine ou en Europe, ne pourrait pas se produire dans les pays arabes. » 40/341 01/02/2012 - Paris - Discours Intervention du ministre d’Etat, ministre des Affaires étrangères et européennes, Alain Juppé, à l’Institut d’Etudes politiques de Paris.

²⁸ « Le ministre d’État rappellera le rôle essentiel des Nations unies pour soutenir toutes solutions visant à répondre aux aspirations des peuples à la liberté, au respect des droits de l’Homme et à la démocratie. Au-delà, il rappellera notre engagement sans nuance aux côtés de ces mouvements, aussi légitimes qu’irrépressibles et s’efforcera de convaincre l’ensemble de nos partenaires de la nécessité d’agir en ce sens. » 09/03/2012 - Paris - Point de presse Réunion du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies lundi prochain sur les Printemps arabes.

²⁹ http://www.marianne2.fr/Sarkozy-et-l-Islam-Cesar-veut-se-meler-des-affaires-de-Dieu_a202906.html

Vous avez des contacts avec les officiels ou avec les activistes ? R - Avec tout le monde. On nous a beaucoup fait le reproche, à la diplomatie française comme à d’autres, au début des «Printemps arabes» de n’avoir parlé qu’avec certains. M. Alain Juppé a donné une instruction: nous devons parler à tous. C’est ce que font nos ambassades dans tous les pays du monde, dans le monde arabe en particulier et en Égypte encore plus particulièrement, 77/341 22/11/2011 - Paris - Point de presse Égypte. Diplomatie.gouv.fr

the UN Charter in case of failure by Annan's mission and the continuation of the repression through military means in Syria.³⁰ France seems determined to accept the victory of the Sunni community when the country will be free from Al-Assad's family, but the French government is anxious about the spread of the Syrian crisis to Lebanon as the recent confrontation between communities in Tripoli and now Beyrouth demonstrated.

France too is concerned about the security of Jordan. More discreetly than in other Arab countries, the kingdom is faced with huge economic and political problems. Despite the change of Prime Ministers, King Abdallah did not succeed in stabilizing the country. France, Great Britain and United States are closely following the situation, as they believe the fall of the Jordanian monarchy would be catastrophic for the strategic balance of the region.

Overall, it will be interesting to follow the relation between France and the old Arab monarchies. In the Gulf, France has two main allies (Qatar and United Arab Emirates). In the Near-East, France discreetly supports the Jordan monarchy and in the Maghreb, of course, Paris maintains traditional close links with the Moroccan palace (*Mahzen*). But the Arab monarchies are not exempt from protests. King Mohamed VI made the reforms necessary to calm the situation in Morocco, yet it is unclear if they will be sufficient in the long term. In other countries, despite a strong and close social control the situation is also potentially problematic. Saudi Arabia now in a dynasty crisis tries to modestly open the democracy process (including women). But we have no capability to forecast these countries capabilities of resistance to change. If the most police-controlled state in the Arab world (Tunisia) succeeded to dismiss its dictator, every regime may be in danger.

Who are the new interlocutors? The official dialogue with Islamist leaders was blocked for many years. Traditionally France spoke discretely with "classical" opponents representing the western model (socialist, liberal, human rightist, and others), individuals and groups generally reflecting, the same values and objectives of France. Yet, these persons gave a false vision of the political situation in their own country, as the evolution in Tunisia and Egypt demonstrated.

Nevertheless, French diplomacy has the capability to adapt and the Islamists interlocutors are quite well known. Most of the Islamists who are now surfacing in government positions have been in the political arena for years. Some suffered many years of jail, exile, ostracism by the former governments or official elites. The leaders of Ennhada, Muslim Brotherhood, PJD and other Islamist groups are still in charge. Even if the French government refused the dialogue—particularly in Tunisia—researchers specialized on Islamist movements and, hopefully, members of intelligence service continued to dialogue with them. Moreover, French diplomacy offers a strong capability to open the channels of discussion. Of course it will take time to build trust-based relations with these interlocutors.

³⁰<http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr; Conférence de presse conjointe d'Alain Juppé avec des représentantes de l'opposition syrienne 25 avril 2012>

It seems that the new French Presidency and the new government will continue this approach. In the complicated landscape pre- and post- revolutions (Egypt being a good example), the difficulty will be to identify the reliable and confident leaders emerging and help them. Between Salafism and a risk of Islamist dictatorship, the way will be narrow to navigate “*l’oiseau rare*”—the rare bird! Because on the other side of the spectrum from Salafism and Jihadism (on the al Qaeda model) will remain the anti-model of Islamist democratic parties. The AKP Turkish model—celebrated in all Arab countries—challenged by other movements which refuse even the concept of elections and polls, advocating armed struggle. Ultimately, the western world and especially France—due to its historical and political position and its huge Muslim (including Arab and Berbers) community—have a responsibility to help the Arab Spring to in the modern wave of democracy and progress.

Inventing a new policy?

Islamist parties may well take power in most Arab countries in the next years (except in Algeria for the moment). This wave requires France to define new relations with its Mediterranean neighborhood. The next French governments must create new links and identify the future Islamist elites. This presupposes accepting some behavior different from a western way of life. In the near future, the Arab societies will not reflect the France’s style, fashion or perceptions. This evolution will be driven by diplomatic issues. It also seems clear that the relationship with Israel should not be the same as well in bilateral relations for Arab States as in multilateral. That is to say that France and Europe will have many difficulties in maintaining an inclusive cooperative process such as the Union for the Mediterranean or any Euro-Mediterranean process including Israel **inside**.³¹

On the other hand, the growing weight of French-born Muslims will influence the relation between France and the other Mediterranean countries. Regarding the Arab uprising, the Muslim/Arab

³¹ The Popular Assembly of Egypt claims for the expulsion of Israel Ambassador and to cease all gas export toward this country; <http://www.maghrebemergent.com/actualite/fil-maghreb/9899-egypte-le-parlement-appelle-a-lexpulsion-de-lambassadeur-disrael-au-caire.html>;

« The spokesperson of the Tunisian presidency denounces « the hostile nature of the *Sionist entity*».

"<http://www.jawharafm.net/news/16266--marzouki-denonce-qla-nature-hostile-de-lentite-sionisteq.html>.

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community in France could play a more important political role in the relation with their countries of origin and, maybe, in the defense of Muslim values. The largest community, the Algerian, is a huge link between both countries. It could play an important role in influencing the bilateral relationship. Of course, the importance of the countries of origin still exists, but a new, more independent force is being born, giving rise to two possible scenarios: the emergence of a coherent French national Muslim identity or fragmentation into ineffective competing groups. In either case, the influence of Muslims in French politics will grow.

The French government has a strong interest in seeing the new governments now being formed in the Middle East and North Africa succeed. Today, the Islamists in charge in many countries seek to emulate the AKP Party in Turkey. They have very conservative social views but espouse liberal economic positions and seek commercial exchanges and integration in the European system. Their own people are expecting dignity, growth and welfare. The last year was economically disastrous for countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. It was also a bad year for Morocco and Jordan. The immediate future does not look much better for these countries. The challenge for France, and for Western countries overall is to help the new governments succeed, despite their political colors. In case of failure, the situation could escalate into civil war and favor the rise of a more dangerous extremism. It is a dramatic challenge.