THE ARC OF CRISIS IN THE MENA REGION

Fragmentation, Decentralization, and Islamist Opposition

edited by **Karim Mezran, Arturo Varvelli**

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PART IV - ENERGY

A Renewed Arc of Crisis in the MENA Region

The "arc of crisis" concept was formulated in 1978 by Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, after various events had shaken the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA). The idea behind this theorization was that an arc of instability was emerging, stretching from the Indian subcontinent to the Atlantic Coast of North Africa. Forty years after such an idea was first conceptualized, the Middle East remains the least stable region on earth. Failing states, wars, jihadi terrorism, migration flows and the refugee emergency are all threats that destabilize the region and contribute to creating a "constantly renewing" arc of crisis, whose consequences have an impact on Western countries as well. The current situation in the MENA region therefore appears to be the byproduct of dynamics of change in the international system, political decisions taken by leading foreign actors, and social, political, and economic dynamics within the Arab-Muslim world.

At the global level, the past two years have been marked by the exacerbation of a process that was already underway for some time: the decline of an international system that is prevalently based on a shared sense of Western values (liberalism, multilateralism, international laws, etc.). A crisis of legitimacy encompasses every fundamental dimension of the current international political system, starting from the principles that characterized every past model of international coexistence,

i.e., the principles that define who are the legitimate subjects within the international order, their status, the distribution of territory between them, and the conditions at which they may legitimately resort to military conflict. All these dynamics arise in the MENA region as well.

This crisis is triggering the growing and renewed assertiveness of potential global rivals of the United States, and particularly Russia and China. The breakdown of the international system into sub-regions that are progressively more independent is increasing the weight of regional powers, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey. This condition is not helping to mitigate the flames of the rivalries, whose original causes are certainly more geopolitical than religious and/or sectarian. In this context, the Trump administration has chosen to revitalize alliances with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel in the attempt to contain Iran, perceived as a major threat and a highly destabilizing actor. Russia seems more interested in trying to become a mediator for regional disputes in the region. In order to gain a privileged geopolitical position in the area, and above all in Syria – where it champions one side over others –, Moscow maintains good relations with many of the regional actors. Not by chance, Russia has broad ties of various natures: from Israel to Iran, from Syria to Saudi Arabia, from Turkey to Lebanon. On the one hand, this allows Russia to consolidate a phase of interventionist foreign policy, functional at the same time to confront the United States. On the other hand, this policy is certainly precarious and costly, and raises the question of whether the Kremlin will be able to fulfill its commitments with the (limited) resources available in the long term.

At the internal level, however, managing power and governance in many MENA countries remains highly problematic. In less stable countries, internal fractures, which have at times led to the outbreak of civil wars, have been intensified by the growing influence of non-state actors on a local and international level. Legitimacy, however, remains very fragile even in

seemingly stable countries. The Gulf countries, for instance, have gained an increasingly important geopolitical role in the region, even while they remain tied to their monarchic forms of leadership, incompatible with other forms of governance such as those sponsored by Muslim Brotherhood. For these reasons, a large part of the Gulf countries' foreign policy is driven by the need to counter political groups perceived as vital threats to their own legitimacy. Egypt is enveloped in a phase of generalized insecurity, a faltering economy, and a crisis of democracy, which will be difficult to overcome unless a new phase of openness to civil society and political participation will be promoted. However, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is avoiding such openness at all costs. Under Erdogan, Turkey is trying to gain strength precisely through the concept of a new legitimacy, bypassing democratic rules, as evident in the "New Turkey" slogan, but this has yet to be modelled in content and form and is subjected to continuous threats, starting from the difficult economic situation. In Iraq, the Arab-Sunni community continues to look askance at the central government, especially now that discussion about post-conflict reconstruction is held mainly within the Shia counterpart.

In this description of a new and complex arc of instability in the MENA region, the international community and individual state actors have few concepts available to stem this instability and fragmentation. Eschewing an exhaustiveness that would be impossible to achieve, this report published by ISPI and the Atlantic Council, edited by Karim Mezran and Arturo Varvelli, intends to analyze a number of aspects linked to the question of legitimacy. First, the issue of decentralization as a bulwark to fragmentation has not yet been entirely explored in political discussion and can offer interesting points even from the policy-making standpoint. Second, the subject of political Islam as an alternative for legitimacy deserves greater attention and must be separated from contingent circumstances, in which it has certainly not enjoyed success, to ponder what forms it could take in the near future. Finally, one last factor, although not as

central as the first two, concerns the discovery of new resources in the energy sector in the eastern Mediterranean and should be assessed as possibly representing a new motive for cooperation and integration among the countries involved, representing a bulwark against propagation of the arc of crisis.

Frederick Kempe   Giampiero Massolo
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PART I

INTRODUCTION

Framework

Karim Mezran, Arturo Varvelli

This report addresses the search for political legitimacy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in recent years. The 2011 uprisings have challenged the nation state's claim of political legitimacy, leading to the emergence of alternatives in various forms, from local clans and tribes to armed groups as well as formally elected municipal councils. The fragmentation of authority has led some, in particular opposition groups, to see the current situation as a chance to secure power in what has otherwise been a closed space. Many are calling for a trial of decentralization to delegate authority and security responsibilities to local leadership. However, widespread demands for decentralization of some sort is juxtaposed with the desire of remaining authoritarian states to close spaces for political opposition and retain control over the population. Also, among the trends that are emerging as alternatives for political legitimacy across the region is political Islam, which has taken on a variety of forms across the region, from armed groups to peaceful opposition. On this point, the report's section on political Islam will explore the Islamist opposition in its search for a new legitimacy alternative to that of the authoritarian state.

The Crisis of Political Legitimacy

In many MENA countries, the management of power and governance is a weak point, causing the legitimacy of many of these

states to remain fragile. In Iraq, for example, the Sunnis continue to look askance at the central government, especially now that the post-conflict reconstruction discussion is held mainly by the Shia. Egypt is enveloped in a phase of generalized insecurity, a faltering economy, and a crisis of democracy hard to overcome except with bold changes that open space for civil society and political participation. However, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is avoiding such moves at all costs. Skepticism toward the central government after decades of highly concentrated, authoritarian rule is present in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. Coupled with this trend, there is increasingly shrinking space for political opposition to the various regimes.

Among the most prominent actors to fill the space left by the state's lack of legitimacy are Islamist political actors. Indeed, certain Islamist political actors have found a voice in the post-2011 period that was previously long repressed by authoritarian rulers. The report will explore this crisis of political legitimacy and discuss how Islamist movements have been received and how the post-2011 governments have dealt with them.

The Growing Power of Sub-National Entities

Alongside the erosion of state legitimacy and strength, various actors have challenged the idea that states are the principle entities in the international arena. Military organizations as well as internal political actors, such as tribes and municipal councils, act outside state control. Many of these have become credible interlocutors for the international community while others have remained relevant only at the local level.

Unexpected actors are increasingly embracing new democratic values, such as the Islamist party Ennahda in Tunisia that has gained wide support. Libya is the quintessential example of non-state actors enjoying dubious or controversial legitimacy due to their control of weapons and entrenchment in economic activity. In Iraq, the population has similarly turned away from the central government toward regional leadership.

This report lays out how states became fragmented, which allowed for alternatives such as armed groups and local authorities to emerge. Within this new framework, the authors explore whether decentralization can serve as a tool for attaining political legitimacy at the local level. Legitimate, decentralized leadership in the region could define a clear direction for engagement by the international community, producing important consequences on political, economic, energy, and security fronts.

Executive Summary and Findings

Prospects for Decentralization

The first part of the report addresses whether decentralization can bring more stability and better governance in the various environments across the region and what impact this process could have on the future stability of the countries, if pursued. These structures are currently being developed in Tunisia, Iraq, and countries beset by civil wars such as Libya. This trend of decentralization has been demanded by those who sought to depose the traditionally centralized authoritarian systems that dominated the region prior to the 2011.

Tunisia has taken the most steps toward decentralizing its government compared to its neighbors. In May 2018, millions of registered voters went to the polls for the first multiparty municipal elections since the fall of the Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali regime, which for years reserved the majority of seats on municipal councils for the ruling party. However, a primary obstacle to decentralization in Tunisia is that the benefits advocates promise may differ from the population's current demands, some which may require planning at the national level.

Libya's post-2011 situation required communities to fend for themselves. In other words, Libya's decentralization was a quick and automatic transition after the fall of the central state, but it

transpired unevenly. Local councils elected in 2014 have under-
taken policing and justice administration tasks. International
aid organizations found them to be the most effective chan-
nel to deliver services to Libyans in need. Due to the public's
skepticism of the central state, decentralization in Libya may
be a necessary component of the country's future. The current
implementation, however, must be modified in order to create
a more uniform system across the country.

Turning to Syria, the regime and its international backers
would be the first to prevent decentralization in order to main-
tain a grip on power. Moreover, both the opposition and Syrian
minorities place value on a collective identity, therefore di-
minishing the favorability of decentralization. There is also no
meaningful historical precedent for decentralization in Syria.
In short, decentralization is likely impossible in the post-war
Syrian context due to opposition on almost all fronts.

Iraq – like Tunisia, Libya, and Syria – experienced a long pe-
riod of highly centralized, authoritarian governance. A federal
system was adopted via the 2005 constitution and has opened
the door for endowing regions with high levels of self-determi-
nation, although in practice such efforts have not gained much
traction. Multiple regions in Iraq have campaigned for a more
autonomous status, especially since 2011, specifically aiming
to trigger Article 119 of the constitution that would allow for
more decentralization. The report explores these developments
as well as how the distribution of oil wealth could shift internal
dynamics if more or certain regions become autonomous.

Political Islam

The second part of this report will examine the changing nature
of political Islam in the region following the marginalization of
the Muslim Brotherhood in the post-2011 era. This section will
focus largely on the emergence of Salafist organizations, such as
the Madkhali Salafists in Libya, and the role they play in polit-
ical systems in the region.

In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood experienced an unprecedented rise and fall in the post-Mubarak era. The Brotherhood sees this time of increasingly harsh crackdowns by the Sisi regime as a test of its resolve and refuses to accept the facts and change its strategies or improve its organization. The disappearance of the group is unlikely due to its popularity and its ability to press on in hard times. However, its future is uncertain.

Tunisia's oldest Islamist party, Ennahda, quickly adapted to popular demands to become the leading party in the country. With such acclaim comes responsibility and blame – largely for the worsening economy, which is a primary concern for Tunisians. Ennahda's rapid rise to popularity sidelined other Islamist groups, creating channels for radicalization. Political marginalization and bad influences from nearby states – such as Algeria and Libya – caused a peak in violent jihadist-inspired attacks from 2013-2015. Ennahda and its moderate vision of political Islam remains popular in Tunisia while the state continues to crack down harshly on other more radical forms of political Islam.

Unlike Tunisia and Egypt, Libya's mainstream Islamists had less popularity at the ballot box and more on the ground, at least initially. In Libya today, the Brotherhood tends to be lumped in with more radical elements. Conservative Madkhali Salafist militias have a heavy presence in western Libya – not to mention their deep involvement in the illicit economy – and are also present in the east under General Khalifa Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army. Mainstream Islamist groups are losing popularity in Libya while that of the Madkhalis is rising.

Islamist groups in Jordan are more divided than they were before the Arab Spring uprisings due to split goals and ideologies among and within the groups. Internally, disagreement revolves around the need to re-structure aims and tactics in response to changing dynamics in Jordan and the region, including the Syrian civil war. The state plays a large role in co-opting, manipulating, and controlling such groups in the country, which likely sparks and continues to increase the splits.

Potential for Natural Gas in the Middle East

The final section of the report addresses the issue of energy in the region, including the challenges and opportunities it presents in the current political climate. Large quantities of natural gas were discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean over the last decade. The author concludes, however, that the probability of using these resources to catalyze regional political stability as well as enhance inter-regional relations is limited. Energy companies may be unwilling to invest in expensive infrastructure in the politically volatile region. Using existing facilities is a possibility but would require addressing long-standing disputes. Indeed, as the author elaborates, the natural gas discoveries have in some cases further aggravated geopolitical issues.

Alternatives for State-Centered Legitimacy as a Key Trend

The emerging alternatives for state legitimacy are a trend that will shape the broader trajectory of the region over the long-term. Authoritarian states will increasingly face groups and ideas that threaten their legitimacy and weaken their rule. This report explores a few of those phenomena in six MENA countries, recognizing similar trends likely exist in other countries as well as the fact that many other trends influence the countries mentioned in the report.

PART II

CURRENT TRENDS:
A CASE FOR DECENTRALIZATION?

1. From Fragmentation to Decentralization: An Overview

Ranj Alaaldin, Karim Mezran[1]

Since 2011, the Arab world has undergone radical changes. State institutions have weakened or collapsed, which has posed increasing challenges to sovereignty. Changes at the domestic and regional level have created conditions conducive to the rise of armed non-state actors (ANSAs) who have undermined state institutions, fragmented authority, and pushed ideological, regional, or secessionist agendas. In 2014, the so-called Islamic State (IS) even declared the end of the nation-state system established a century ago in the Middle East. At the international level, policymakers are uncertain about how to respond to these challenges.

Whether it is in Colombia, Venezuela, Afghanistan, or the Middle East, armed groups have a complicated and multi-faceted relationship with the state and society and can range from profit-orientated criminal groups, smugglers, and tribes to ideological, regional, socio-political movements that include paramilitaries, militias, insurgents, and secessionists. Scholars and policy-makers have coined various terms to describe areas where the state has either partly or entirely collapsed, referring to these as failed states, fragmented states or divided states and societies. The areas controlled or dominated by armed groups have been described as "ungoverned spaces".

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[1] The first two sub-chapters were written by Ranj Alaaldin, while the third one was written by Karim Mezran.

The essays in the following section will illustrate the interplay between ANSAs and the state and society, attempting to redefine the current understanding that ANSAs are necessarily criminals, proxies, or warlords that function in governance vacuums. Further, the following essays will examine whether these actors and the state can mutually reinforce one another and the extent to which the state, which still retains its imprimatur of international norms of sovereignty and has the legal system on its side, can improve the behavior of violent non-state actors.

The first essay will discuss the fragmentation that usually occurs when ANSAs become stronger than the state; then it will proceed with an exploration of how perhaps through a system of decentralization, state power could be reconstructed. The goal of examining the topic of decentralization is to identify the various crises in the region and present decentralization as a possible system to reach a mutual agreement among all conflicting parties and obtain the much-desired stabilization of the countries involved.

In the following essays, various authors will then explore the unique situations of Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Tunisia, and determine whether decentralization would help address the various challenges each state faces.

Challenges to the Arab State Model

Throughout its history and notwithstanding several political and economic challenges – such as the Iran-Iraq war or the first Gulf War, just to mention a few – Arab states have demonstrated a certain degree of resilience. For a while, it even seemed as though the regional system would remain intact, in spite of the destabilizing consequences of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. For almost a decade, Iraq's sectarian conflict, the ascendancy of militant groups like al-Qaeda in Iraq (the previous incarnation of IS), militant Arab Sunni insurgents, and a plethora of Shia militia groups were confined within the borders of Iraq. Moreover, the autonomy of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and its relative political

and economic success did not provide the opportunity structures for similar Kurdish autonomous or quasi-independent regions to emerge in neighboring Turkey, Iran, and Syria.

Yet, with the advent of the Arab uprisings in 2011, the fragility of the state and sectarian conflict, as experienced in Iraq, was replicated across the region, such as in Syria and Yemen. State institutions have collapsed, and it is now questionable if statehood can ever be rehabilitated as sub-national identities based on ethnicity and religion continue to thrive in uncontested and ungoverned spaces. This is not to suggest that the entire Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has suffered the same fate but, rather, that the transnational element of conflict in the region has led to multiple ungoverned spaces in which armed groups that have little respect for human rights and international norms have become powerful mobilizers of people and resources and have replaced the elites as the administrators of territory. With support from regional patrons, these transnational actors have become the providers of services and security and their networks extend across the region, rendering meaningless once resilient and impermeable boundaries. Moreover, this shift comes amid the advent of globalization, which has allowed armed groups to amplify their capacity to mobilize people and resources and, therefore, their ability to confront the state.

Given this situation, it is evident that the region has less of a sectarian or religious problem and more of a governance problem. Elites with political power have for decades lacked vision and the capacity to move their respective countries forward, despite enjoying a large youth population, natural resources, and access to international markets. The threat of transnational terrorism, the prominence of sectarian or identity politics, and proxy war may not have been fueled by factors outside of the control of decision-makers; rather, these problems can be attributed to governance failures and the politics of the elite.

As has increasingly been the case in conflict zones such as Iraq and Syria, where foreign powers and international organizations

have sought to resolve crises, it is now the militias, tribes and religious leaders that dominate on the ground. Thus, governments and the international community have often had to engage and negotiate with these sub-state actors. This is not novel, but it is increasingly becoming the norm.

The Issue: The Need To Develop New Modes To Engage with Sub-State Groups

On the surface, the transformation of militia heads and armed groups into the administrators of a state is not an ideal formula for good governance, considering these are often groups who have little regard for international norms and human rights. At the same time, the orthodox approach of combating groups through a simple counterterrorism strategy – one that sees containment and selective killings as its main points – is no longer possible. The international system needs to be more flexible by engaging groups that are willing to embrace international norms and whose longevity is not dependent on ethnic and sectarian tensions. We should no longer ask whether the regional architecture is sustainable but rather whether it is possible to establish a new equilibrium and regional order from the recently emerged configuration of non/para-state actors and whether these actors can work constructively with the remnants of the old states. There is plenty in the existing literature to suggest that this is in fact possible. ANSAs are not necessarily anti-state just because they are non-state, and the prominence of ANSAs does not forcibly lead to state failure. Groups ranging from those in Southeast Asia to the Middle East emerge and function not automatically because of state failure but because of historical animosities, long-term oppression, and perceptions of injustices and denial of rights. These actors do not necessarily emerge from conflict and power-vacuums but are ingrained in the communities and environments they operate in because of interactions that have developed over prolonged periods. These contentions come from existing studies that posit that

the analysis of armed groups should not be confined to their interactions with their host states but also society at large, other movements, and other ideologies[2]. Moreover, local communities and civilians have agency in conflict zones and can also help nudge armed groups into adopting certain behavior, policies, and international norms[3].

Contrary to the popular understanding of armed groups, their origins can be traced back to the state-building process that unfolded in Europe during the Middle Ages, when citizens were called upon to collectively defend the realm[4]. As political scientist Charles Tilly points out, these so-called "citizen militias" enabled the creation of protection rackets wherein civilians paid for protection against external threats but also against abuse and intimidation from the militias themselves. As these rackets became more formalized, they served as the basis for the creation of state institutions: the dues became "taxes" and the militias eventually became standing armies[5].

Militias and armed groups may have caught international attention in recent years with the advent of the Arab uprisings and the Islamic State, but they actually became prevalent after decolonization and the emergence of an international system that was dominated by fragile or weak states. Super-power politics during the Cold War spawned a militia phenomenon as willing proxies were afforded immense resources in the battle for global

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[2] E. Stein, "Beyond Arabism vs. sovereignty: relocating ideas in the international relations of the Middle East", *Review of International Studies*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2012, pp. 881-905; Y. Voller, *The Kurdish Liberation Movement in Iraq: From Insurgency to Statehood*, London, Routledge, 2014.

[3] O. Kaplan, "Nudging Armed Groups: How Civilians Transmit Norms of Protection", *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development,* vol. 2, no. 3*,* 2013, pp. 1-18.

[4] For a history of the role of militias in the formation of medieval states, see Joseph R. Strayer, *Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1970.

[5] C. Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime", in P. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer, and T. Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In* (eds.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press*,* 1985, pp. 169-187.

dominance. Yet, the post-Cold War international system was not revised to account for the armed groups that, in the absence of the patronage they were afforded by international powers, would become powerful actors in their own right, autonomous from their patrons, and oblivious to international norms. Their unaccountability and capacity to function independently and in informal, criminalized economics only exacerbated the decay of the state, particularly in countries that had emerged from colonialism with fragile or weak states.

The self-perpetuating cycle that sustains the environment in which armed groups thrive ultimately leaves no option but to either work with these groups or integrate them into the political system. As the US experience in Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan, among others, shows: state-building has afforded armed groups insufficient attention; therefore, there is often limited understanding of groups that may potentially constitute spoilers of peace and stability but that, at the same time, have far-reaching popular support and resources.

The matter becomes further complicated because sometimes it is difficult to draw the line that separates militias from state or conventional forces, such as the police and military. This complicated overlap between the state and militia organizations, some of whom have become fully integrated components of the political process, discredits the often-made assertion that it is ultimately good governance and the building of institutions that can remedy instability and conflict in the region, as those very institutions will inevitably end up becoming dominated by the armed groups in many cases.

As already alluded to above, what is emerging in places like Iraq, Syria, and Libya but also in other parts of the region is the ascendancy of armed non-state actors that have substantial interaction with the state. These are actors that mold themselves into para-state actors that seek integration into the state as a means to acquire resources. They also seek local and international legitimacy yet, conversely, refuse to demobilize. Defeating them militarily will be difficult if not impossible and,

in any case, brings more costs than benefits to already fragile states.

The dichotomy that is often used to engage the issue of armed groups is an unhelpful one, as it dismisses these actors in their entirety as threats to the state. In addition to failing to appreciate the already mentioned overlap these actors have with, and the legitimacy they enjoy within their local communities, it also disregards the reality that armed non-state actors have, in multiple cases, supplanted the state in the provision of services and security, affording immense resilience to war-torn communities.

Armed groups may often emerge from, or become particularly visible because of, both inter-state and intrastate conflict, often in so-called informal wars that do not adhere to the traditional, Westphalian characteristics of modern warfare. While they do not necessarily cause the fragmentation of the state, they are responses to such fragmentation. The difficulty with establishing the causal logic that underpins the nexus between state weakness or failure and armed groups has given way to alternative arguments that challenge the notion that good governance can defeat armed groups, drawing on the limited availability of empirical evidence[6].

It is to the multiple identities of the armed groups that policymakers must look toward. Shia militias in Iraq are not only vast in their numbers but also have significant overlap and interactions with the Iraqi state and society. Some are offshoots of Iraqi Shia opposition groups who fought the former Baath regime; some enjoy extensive ties to the Shia religious establishment or the *marjaiyya*. Some are Iranian-proxies while others are state aligned. Some militia heads have even held ministerial posts. When the state collapsed after 2003, these groups filled the resulting vacuum to provide protection and services to local communities. While armed groups have straddled the line that

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[6] J. Hazelton, "Why Good Governance Does Not Defeat Insurgencies", *International Security*, Harvard Belfer Center, 7 August 2017.

separates Hobbesian anarchy with the institution-building of the Westphalian nation-state, they can both complement the state in an effective and constructive manner or provide necessary services and structures of governance absent the state, but, at the same time, can also supplant the state and constitute catalysts of state decay.

Armed groups also sometimes function as agents of the state. In Iraq, so-called state-aligned Shia militias are not integrated into the armed forces, but they generally answer to the federal government. Even if these actors do not become integrated into the armed forces in their entirety, supporting them can provide an opportunity to create leverage that remains noticeably absent.

Policymakers should engage and examine armed groups through the prism of civic development and civilian empowerment. Armed groups that have popular support and resources can empower civil-society and other segments of society that would otherwise be suppressed by the power and corruption of elites. The dynamics of interaction between the multiple lines of authority in Iraq – ranging from civil-society to members of the political class to the religious establishment and even to organizations who are complicit in violence and instability – can help establish a culture of accountability while also empowering the agents of change.

The challenge, however, is one of translating protests into public policy. The political class and the administrators of the state have remained unresponsive to these challenges, in large part because of corruption and patronage. As it stands, civil-society in Iraq has been effective in mobilizing large swathes of the population for protests against the government but can be disorganized and ineffective when it comes to influencing public policy and accountability.

The state still holds its imprimatur of the international norm of sovereignty and remains the only actor capable of shaping the country's constitutional and legal system. That has encouraged even hardline militias to seek integration into the political

process – for example by establishing parties and contesting elections – to acquire legitimacy and credibility.

What differentiates armed groups from one another is indeed the extent to which they seek integration and recognition. The picture becomes somewhat more complicated when these armed groups are national liberation movements that seek their own state, as opposed to being integrated into an existing territorial state. The Kurds, for example, have long sought statehood but what has made them comparatively successful as armed groups is their attempts to acquire both international recognition and legitimacy. Pursuant to this goal, their discourse and interactions have generally been steeped in international norms and fundamental human rights: they speak the language of democracy and the rule of law so as to become integrated into the international system and, ultimately, acquire their own state.

The challenge for policymakers is not necessarily whether armed groups aspire to become, or to perceive themselves, as state-builders that can complement the state and its provision of services to the local population but, rather, the vision they have for the future of the state and its identity. The process should be redefined so that it involves not asking militias to give up their guns and power, but rather incorporating them into a social dialogue and a political contract that aims to secure their stake in the decision-making processes.

All too often, armed groups operate in a social and legal lacuna, since their precise relationship with the state and society remains fluid and ill-defined. This breeds uncertainty and, therefore, unwillingness to engage in dialogue and consensus-based politics. To address this, the authority that armed groups have must be better defined: where does their authority begin and where does it end? Defining these legal parameters – but also, more importantly, the socio-cultural nexus between armed groups, the state, and society – can help breed a culture of accountability.

To move forward, the international community should shift the focus away from traditional policy engagements. Crises in

the Arab world need solutions from within the Arab world. Political compromise must become the norm and no longer be the exception. This requires aiming for consensus-based politics, rather than full-fledged democracy. At the very least, this can help accommodate the radically transformed nature of governance and authority in the region, which is more dynamic than ever before. The dynamics of interaction between the multiple lines of authority must be afforded greater appreciation so as to establish more inclusive, legitimate national frameworks that can reinforce the relationship between citizen and state.

Regionally, in the long-term, a consensus is required that is based around mutual security interests. In the interim, with international support, the region can establish common economic and reconstruction platforms for the post-conflict Arab states, the idea being that engagements based around pragmatism, rather than trust, can alleviate conflict and push for the transition of Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya into theaters for co-existence and inclusive cooperation, rather than theaters for proxy warfare.

Decentralization as a Way to Order and Stability

Decentralization is the process of transferring responsibility, power, and control of resources from central to local-level governments in order to improve governance and maintain political stability. Decentralization is not simply moving government functions to more and different locations. Instead, the functions and resources must be under control of local communities.

The independence of local councils requires endowing them with mechanisms to collect and spend their own revenue as well as elect municipal-level political officials without too much interference from the central government. Giving local councils political and financial autonomy brings the government closer to the people it serves. This also increases the efficiency of service delivery because local leaders can tailor their priorities and projects to local conditions. Another goal decentralization could achieve is improving communication between civil society and

the government, making the government more responsive to a specific population's demands.

As discussed above, the integration of armed groups into a legitimate state-endorsed structure is key to the success of any stabilization plan. It becomes rapidly apparent how a strong and effective decentralization project can provide the tools to overcome the fragmentation of authority which fosters the empowerment of disparate militias. At the same time, there should be a careful understanding of the many differences and particularities of the territories involved and the conscious realization that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Decentralization and devolution may not work everywhere. Even where these principles could be adopted to bring a positive contribution, there are necessary preliminary steps to ensure success.

The focus when projecting benefits of decentralization is largely on fiscal and physical government services. A dimension that will be affected as well is public order: by delivering important institutions to the citizen level – such as municipal police and a local justice system – public order can be more easily achieved. Citizens will become convinced that they have a stake in the system and their participation in public affairs will increase, therefore enhancing the working of the pluralist system.

In addition to tailoring the decentralized state to address each state's specific context, an educational campaign should be undertaken to inform the citizenship on the duties rather than just the rights of such a process of decentralization. This will assist with building the capacity to train qualified individuals to be politicians in all corners of the country. Creating a new generation of effective politicians and political administrators is both a requirement and an outcome of decentralization. Investment is needed in developing politicians at the local level who will effectively serve their communities, meanwhile gaining essential experience so they can later serve at the national level. Such mid-career political positions largely do not exist in these countries today. As a result, lawyers, doctors, and elite families are the only ones to make it into government positions.

Opening the door to all citizens to work in the government will produce a larger number of politicians pulled from a more diverse pool of candidates, therefore bringing fresh ideas and diverse backgrounds to the table. The international community can help in this endeavor by providing training and educational support.

While decentralization could herald many positive changes, it is not a panacea. Indeed, the very benefits for a population's sense of identity and empowerment that come with decentralization may exacerbate motivations for secession or partition[7]. Other fears around decentralization include that it worsens inequality and political instability, increases opportunity for corruption at the local level, and is unattainable in some states that are already facing governmental capacity limits. These risks are addressed in the situations of certain countries, such as Syria.

Corruption and incompetence are even more probable at the local level where the authority of extra-state structures such as tribes and clans is more prominent. To overcome the propensity for corruption, civil society should be empowered to contrast any slide in this direction.

The evolution of mass media is fundamental in this step. Only a country that fosters responsible and courageous media can see a healthy transformation of its political structure from a centralized state to a decentralized one. Decentralization should also be seen as part of a larger national project of the disarmament and integration of militias and armed groups in general. Since most of these groups have a local base, it makes sense to resolve their situation at the local level. Giving the authority to the municipal councils to deal with the reabsorption of militias into the civil structure of the state could be a winning decision.

Decentralization's potential major contribution to resolving civic strife is that it would provide immediate avenues of participation to the citizenship. Citizens will be able to access

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[7] K. Bakke, *Decentralization and Intrastate Struggles*, Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 17.

authority at the local level with much more confidence and possibly obtain immediate results. This will provide a renewal of trust in the state and allow citizens to more constructively participate in the political life of the community at large.

Innovation and experimentation are required to implement decentralization, and decentralization must be tailored to each country's needs. There is no one model for decentralization in the MENA. Each country is beginning with a separate, unique context. Tunisia presently has a relatively strong central government and carried out municipal elections in May 2018 in order to begin the decentralization process. Libya, on the other hand, has a weak central government and has been operating in a state of decentralization that was never formalized and is therefore inconsistent across the country. Both the Syrian regime and its backers do not have an interest in decentralization. Regardless of its possible effectiveness, the chances of implementing such a system in Syria are low. Iraq has yet to implement all the visions for decentralization incorporated in the 2005 constitution. Decentralization is not a silver bullet. Due to shifts in power from state to sub-state actors as well as the complex histories of these four countries, however, decentralization should be explored as a potential remedy.

2. Decentralization in Tunisia: Its Utility and Competing Visions for Implementation

Fadil Aliriza

Tunisia's 2010-11 uprising began in its marginalized regions[1]. The province of Sidi Bouzid, where the protests first began, is a largely rural, inland region of the country. The neighboring province of Kasserine, which was quick to follow Sidi Bouzid in joining the revolt against the regime of then-President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, is also a rural inland region of Tunisia. Of the more than 300 Tunisians killed and more than 2,000 wounded during the revolution, according to official figures[2], a disproportional number of victims were in the larger towns of these regions[3]. Why were both the popular anger and the state's violent reaction so acute in these regions? Amidst a

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[1] "Marginalization" carries with it the connotation that these regions did not merely "fall behind" in development, but rather that their lack of development was a result of state policy, that their lack of development was inversely related to the positive development of coastal regions. While "marginalization" is now a commonly recognized phenomenon in Tunisia, this was not the case prior to the revolution.

[2] A. Mansouri, "Lecture critique du rapport Bouderbala: Que l'Histoire est mensongère", *Nawaat*, 12 June 2012.

[3] Author's calculations using ratios of dead according to official statistics in Bouderbala report and the State's Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD) to population. For numbers of killed in Kasserine and Thala, see "Tunisie: "L'IVD Soumet Le Dossier Des Martyres Et Blessés De La Révolution De Thala Et Kasserine Aux Chambres Judiciaires Spécialisées", *Instance de Vérité et Dignité,* 19 May 2018.

myriad of plausible reasons, one compelling explanation that captures numerous factors is inequitable regional development and the mechanisms of political and economic disenfranchisement that perpetuate it. In the post-2011 era, policymakers have proposed to resolve this disenfranchisement through a program of decentralization.

While advocates of decentralization in Tunisia have different motives and goals for what they hope it can achieve, one vision for decentralization is its potential to empower people, carving out space for them with some autonomy from the central government. This perhaps optimistic vision has contributed to decentralization's prominent place in the political agenda since the revolution in terms of rhetoric, policies, and legislation, including its inclusion as a pillar in the 2014 Constitution. In the section on general principles, Article 14 states that "the state commits to strengthen decentralization and to apply it throughout the country, within the framework of the unity of the state"[4]. Meanwhile, Chapter Seven of the Constitution is entirely dedicated to delineating the powers of local government institutions.

To better understand decentralization in Tunisia and its potential for reshaping the relations between citizens and the state, it is important to consider a few things. First, a de jure process of decentralization has begun since the 2011 revolution. The central government and international partners led these efforts, which took the form of a legalistic, top-down model. This significant procedural achievement in this process occurred in May 2018 when Tunisia held, albeit after several delays, its first free and fair multiparty municipal elections. Second, the formal state reform process that includes decentralization is suffering a crisis of legitimacy. It is not the central state that appears to be the driving force for political change in post-revolutionary Tunisia, but rather civil society groups, local and national movements, international financial institutions

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[4] "Tunisia's Constitution of 2014", translated by UNDP, *ConstituteProject.org*, 11 March 2015.

(IFIs), international development institutions, and international cooperation mechanisms, which are taking on increasingly important roles. Finally, the *de jure* process of decentralization may in fact be an attempt to restrain or get ahead of the revolutionary, volatile, and fragmented forms of politics that are occurring outside of the central state's institutional framework.

There is a need to qualify that discussions of "decentralization" are often normative – what it "should" do or "should" look like – particularly in analyses put forth by scholars of democratization, advocates of liberal democracy promotion, and international development institutions who see an inherent or potential link between decentralization and democratization[5]. These arguments tend to see "decentralization" – i.e., a state-led policy that changes the *formal* institutions of power – neither as a process of increasing *informal* power centers at local levels outside of existing institutions nor as a process of disintegrating or weakening central state powers.

However, to assess the actual changes on the ground in Tunisia since 2011 requires a fundamental rethinking of the possibilities of decentralization in practice, not a normative or prescriptive perspective. The degree to which power is devolved in the framework of decentralization is a matter of politics, contestation, and negotiation rather than any top-down, technocratic, discrete policy roadmap. As scholar Hèla Yousfi notes:

> institutions cannot be reduced to their general official functions; rather, they are based on particular collective imaginations that establish what is legitimate or not […] It is therefore necessary to move from a technical approach in the implementation of institutional changes towards a socio-cultural approach that integrates the local expectations of "good governance"[6].

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[5] L. Diamond, "Why Decentralize Power in a Democracy?", Working Paper, presented to the Conference on Fiscal and Administrative Decentralization, Baghdad, 12 February 2004; "Decentralization: A Sampling of Definitions", UNDP Working Paper, October 1999; "Decentralization", World Bank, 6 June 2013.

[6] H. Yousfi, "Redessiner les relations Etat/collectivités locales en Tunisie: enjeux

The Formal Process of Decentralization Since 2011

During the revolution in December 2010 and January 2011, Tunisians rising up against the regime directed their anger at representatives of the regime as well as symbols of the state more generally. In particular, the police forces and police stations were targets as well as municipal officials' and governors' offices. In some cases, protesters set fire to local government buildings and ran local officials out of town[7]. One editorial suggests that by early 2011, due to continuing unrest, mayors of a majority of Tunisia's municipal councils were no longer present running day-to-day business. This may reflect real and continuing tensions between citizens and local representatives of the state[8]. Mohamed Bouazizi, a catalyst for the revolution, was first abused by a municipal police officer and in protest self-immolated in front of the governor's office. The population's anger directed at local officials helped prompt the dissolution of municipal councils and their subsequent replacement with "special delegations", some of whose members were selected through informal local consultative processes. The new temporary special delegations, which themselves lacked electoral legitimacy, were the first top-down response to "the revolutionary situation […] marked by the explosion of local protests which called into question the modes of centralized management"[9].

   Article 14 of the new constitution, passed in 2014, establishes decentralization as a pillar of state policy and guarantees the independence and autonomous powers of elected local

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[7] socio-culturels et institutionnels du projet de décentralisation", Agence Francaise de Developpement, Research Papers no. 47, 1 June 2017, p. 7.

[7] "Tunisia: Hold Police Accountable for Shootings", Human Rights Watch, 29 January 2011.

[8] "Dissolution des Conseils municipaux: les raisons et les modalités de désignation des délégations spéciales", *Leaders*, 10 March 2011. The source, which explicitly offers opinion rather than objective reporting, does not clarify how it arrived at this number, and so this number, while plausible given corroborating reports at the time, must be appreciated with some skepticism.

[9] H. Yousfi (2017), p. 18.

authorities in Chapter Seven (Articles 131-142). That same year, the World Bank began a project with the Tunisian government to reshape service delivery at the local government level. The project outlined a formula for distributing financial resources to local governments, which skewed heavily according to population size rather than needs. This new approach elicited criticism for appearing to contradict Article 12 of the constitution mandating "positive discrimination" toward marginalized areas in development projects[10]. In May 2016, the government issued a series of decrees that created eighty-five new municipalities and adjusted the jurisdictions of others so that all Tunisians would be covered by municipalities[11]. Prior to that, only two-thirds of the Tunisian population were living within a municipal jurisdiction[12]. As part of decentralization, the state also has worked to set up twelve regional branches of administrative courts across the country, meant to provide better services to citizens through proximity as well as offer better awareness and information of local land disputes[13].

As for legislation to follow up on and detail constitutional principles, the Code des Collectivités Locales (CCL) was passed after more than a year of drafting at the end of April 2018, less than a month before the first free and fair local elections were held. Importantly, the law gives additional autonomy to elected officials, who no longer need approval from central government-appointed governors for all decisions or parliamentary

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[10] Y. Bellamine, "Gouvernance locale: Quand la Banque Mondiale s'immisce dans la gestion de nos municipalités!", *Nawaat*, 3 February 2015.

[11] Journal Officiel de La République Tunisienne (JORT), no. 43, 159th year, 27 May 2016, http://www.iort.gov.tn/WD120AWP/WD120Awp.exe/CTX_4716-17-VEHDWRawVy/RechercheJORT/SYNC_1272606470

[12] C. Bouhlel and M. Haddad, "S3EP02 Municipalités pour tous et partout. Qu'est-ce que ça change? Reportage à Zaghouan et Saouaf", *Barr Al Aman*, podcast audio, September 2017, http://news.barralaman.tn/fr/s3ep02/. The entire third season of the Barr Al Aman national radio show and podcast covers the intricacies of decentralization.

[13] C. Bouhlel and M. Haddad, "S3EP04 Justice jartout, justice pour nous?", *Barr Al Aman*, podcast audio, October 2017.

approval for certain spending decisions. Some political figures, particularly those associated with the old regime, criticized the law on the basis that it weakened central power and created the conditions for state disintegration and conflict. One former high-level official for the now-disbanded, former ruling Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD) party, for example, commented during the CCL drafting process that with the planned devolution of powers through decentralization, "gradually, the central government will abdicate its powers and jurisdiction and leave regions drunk with freedom struggling in their unresolved financial problems and their vain demands"[14].

On the other hand, those advocating for a more robust break with the centralized forms of governance that characterize the former authoritarian regimes have criticized the CCL as having been crafted by the Interior Ministry, the main organ of the former police state that retains vast coercive powers over citizens and other institutions of the state. That is to say that the formal process of decentralization is being driven and conducted primarily by the central state, which has an interest in retaining its powers, rather than by citizens or even civil servants at the local level who may have other priorities and a different vision. As one municipal official remarked to the scholar Hèla Yousfi:

> The General Directorate of Local Authorities (DGCL) of the Ministry of the Interior wrote the draft Code of Local Authorities intended to consign decentralization. Absolutely, it's the ministry, meaning the central authority, devising decentralization. It's paradoxical […] The code of local collectivities was made for decentralization by people who are against decentralization […] The Ministry of the Interior prepared the bill, our problem comes from this ministry; as long as it is not reformed we will be under the yoke of the Ministry of Interior[15].

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[14] A. Mohsen, "Le nouveau code des collectivités locales: comment éviter le délitement de l'Etat?", *Leaders*, 14 April 2017.

[15] H. Yousfi (2017), p. 31.

Moreover, local officials and civil society activists complain that consultations over the draft did not give sufficient time for substantive input from them, especially in regions outside of the capital[16].

A Competing Vision of Decentralization

The normative vision of decentralization as a project common in international development and democracy promotion faces challenges even on its own terms. One perspective is that "decentralization exports the pathologies of the center to the periphery"[17]. Putting aside the problem that there is little consensus around what a "de-pathologized" state should look like in the first place, this assessment does make a compelling point that decentralization could reproduce the problems of state-citizen interactions at the local level, particularly with regard to issues of corruption, nepotism, patronage, authoritarian practices, inequitable development, and public spending, among others. Another challenge is that while the benefits of decentralization are often presented as self-evident truth in policy briefs, there is a relative lack of rigorous scientific analysis to refute or support these claims, with one scholar finding that "almost no robust empirical findings have been reported about the consequences of decentralization"[18]. Most importantly, in the case of Tunisia, decentralization does not appear to be tailored to address the cause of friction between citizens and the state.

This is to say that the Tunisian government's decentralization policies are in some cases at odds with what the population wants from decentralization. For example, while the new

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[16] S. Yerkes and M. Muasher, "Decentralization in Tunisia: Empowering Towns, Engaging People", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 2018.

[17] T. Carothers, "Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 31 December 1999.

[18] D. Treisman, *The Architecture of Government: Rethinking Political Decentralization*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 5.

constitution and some officials have cited the need for "positive discrimination" in targeting poorer regions of the country for development projects, many in poorer regions have stressed the fact that they have been deliberately marginalized for decades because of actions by Tunisia's central government, and they are demanding reparations. One state institution, the Truth and Dignity Authority (IVD), has formed a reparations committee and received a dossier from civil society organizations demanding the governorate of Kasserine be designated a "victimized region"[19]. However, the IVD has been undermined by other state institutions and resurgent old regime political forces that have explicitly expressed opposition to the transitional justice process.

While decentralization and devolution of power may be part of the solution for Kasserine's marginalization, the dossier submitted on its behalf to the IVD extends past issues of decentralization. This indicates that aside from "the strong centralization of power that excluded the regions from really participating in decision making", there are broader national level macroeconomic policies relating to "[favoritism] with regard to investments, bad governance, nepotism and corruption," which "all worked together as aggravating factors ensuring marginalization or organized exclusion of certain regions including Kasserine"[20]. Economic development, trade policies, and public goods programs in education, healthcare, and other sectors necessitate planning and policy implementation at the national level and are beyond the scope of local public works and services.

It is worth quoting the scholar Lana Salman at length to highlight the discrepancy between how politicians, technocrats, development professionals, and IFIs are shaping Tunisia's decentralization and how some Tunisians see an alternative decentralization. Salman writes:

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[19] "Request to declare the region of Kasserine as 'victim'", drafted by Tunisian Forum on Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) and Lawyers Without Borders (ASF).
[20] O. Belhassine, "Kasserine as a Victimized Region of Tunisia", *JusticeInfo.net*, 30 June 2015.

> Focusing on what we talk about when we talk about decentralization is an avenue to rethink how a particular register re-politicizes decentralization from the margins, imbuing it with a strong orientation towards regional development […] political decentralization (municipalization) [*sic*] was a top-down process: the central government decided on the sequencing of political decentralization chronologically and procedurally including which existing jurisdictions will be divided into more than one municipality, which jurisdictions will be amalgamated and which jurisdictions will be created from scratch. The central government will also be responsible for the initial allocation of resources to set-up these municipalities. In the current post-revolution context, these practices will not go uncontested, especially that they are a reminder of a not so distant autocratic past of manipulating Tunisia's territorial organization [...] A political decentralization process which does not include the peripheral voices of those who have self-identified as dwellers of "victimized regions" will give birth to politically atrophied municipalities, shiny buildings in otherwise desolate and impoverished territories [...] In post-revolution Tunisia, activists and international financial organizations talk differently about decentralization[21].

Attempting to translate this argument into a policy-oriented one, it might be said that decentralization as a process whose authorship does not include stakeholders such as marginalized locals risks exacerbating rather than ameliorating citizen-state tensions. This is particularly true in the case of Tunisia's current decentralization trajectory that appears to sidestep the more pressing socio-economic grievances that are fueling existing political tensions, particularly regional development. The vision of regional development proposed in the current process of decentralization lays out a path for local governments to depend less on the central state for economic support rather than for more investment from the central state in local governance, which appears to contradict popular demands.

Moreover, local and regional grievances against central government policies are in fact being challenged on the ground,

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[21] L. Salman, "What we talk about when we talk about decentralization? Insights from post-revolution Tunisia", *L'Année du Maghreb*, no. 16, 2017, pp. 91-108.

through direct actions rather than through the formal political institutions of local government bodies. On the island of Kerkennah in Spring 2016, locals became locked in a dispute with an international hydrocarbon company operating in the area and the local government over the management of local resources. Locals blocked hydrocarbon extraction and residents kicked out the police that violently attacked activists. Eventually, there were negotiations with formal government institutions, which produced an agreement for the resumption of normal governance and economic activity. A year later at the pump station of Kamour, locals in the southern governorate of Tataouine blocked hydrocarbon production until central government officials negotiated with them[22]. These and other similar examples underscore that "localized protests reveal the logic of non-institutionalized contention that continues to define critical political engagement in post-Revolutionary Tunisia"[23].

This non-institutionalized, localized form of contentious politics is a way in which locals force central state authorities to address issues that matter to them and deal with them on their terms, rather than through the formal institutions of local government. In a sense, locals are seizing power themselves and effecting a sort of devolution that short-circuits the decentralization process that is intended to formally devolve power to them.

Conclusion

Decentralization's manifestation as a political project in Tunisia since 2011 has largely hewed to the project of political *transition*

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[22] H. Chennaoui, H. Lassoued, and C. Hughes, "El Kamour: Resistance in the south radicalizes despite intimidation", trans. V. Szakal, *Nawaat*, 15 May 2017; Y. Cherif, "The Kamour Movement and Civic Protests in Tunisia", Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 8 August 2017.

[23] L. Chomiak, "The Revolution in Tunisia Continues", Middle East Institute, 22 September 2016.

and *reform*, which Dakhlia sees as being largely in tension with the project of Tunisia's *revolution*:

> The problem here is to know if the reform of institutions – of the state – is a prerequisite for social justice or if it comes along with social justice, if it is an expression of social justice. We have clearly adopted a logic whereby institutional reform is a perquisite [*sic*] – a prerequisite that is substituted for the goal of social justice and the initial revolutionary project[24].

Reform, including decentralization, may be seen as one measure to tame the revolutionary tendencies of political unrest, but if social justice issues remain unaddressed, tension – and even violence – may continue to plague relations between the state and citizens.

According to polling that preceded the May 2018 elections, most Tunisians hoped that democratically elected local governments with some discretion in spending would lead to better services, economic improvement, and less corruption[25]. However, high expectations for change have disappointed Tunisians in the past and may yet again. Moreover, services and undefined "economic improvement" may not be the most pressing issues, as many of the most explosive national political issues in recent years have been about specific economic issues like natural resource governance and distribution, land management, and employment, all of which require coherent national strategies that cannot be replaced entirely by local solutions. Grassroots political action by ordinary citizens continues to shape Tunisian politics outside of formal institutional channels, but the possibility that decentralization and devolved power can be instituted in a way that responds to local communities on their own terms is a key test for the relative success of decentralization as a project.

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[24] J. Dakhlia, trans. M. Haleh Davis, "Can We Think in Transition? Reflections From Tunisia", *Jadaliyya*, 30 June 2016.

[25] "Public Opinion Survey of Tunisians, November 23-December 3, 2017", International Republican Institute, p. 56.

Decentralization has been a key state project since the 2011 uprising, one with an implicit political aim of addressing or appearing to address the grievances of marginalized regions through greater local-level empowerment and autonomy. The translation of the constitution's decentralization principles into legislation and administrative practices has been largely a top-down process directed by central authorities. Locals in marginalized regions and communities have been contesting central state power through channels outside of the formal state institutions as a means to address their socio-economic grievances, suggesting that decentralization has not yet succeeded in transforming state institutions at the local level into the kind of mechanisms with effective power that might be used to address these grievances. While decentralization, the devolution of power to local governments, and local elections could be considered part of a larger project that may channel local contestation and local politics into the formal arena, it appears that the formal decentralization process is unaligned with the facts on the ground.

3. Decentralization: The Last Resort for Libya?

Karim Mezran, Erin A. Neale

The situation in Libya is one of confusion and chaos and many fear a fate such as that of Somalia. At every level there are kaleidoscopic divisions and shifting rivalries, which are resulting in an extensive and entrenched illicit economy, an increase in the presence of radical groups, and the clashing of unfettered armed factions in almost every region of the country. Many attempts have been made by domestic and international actors to reach a deal that would contribute to the stabilization of the country, but most have encountered increasing difficulties because of the preference of many actors to maintain the *status quo* from which they profit. Since the fall of Muammar Qaddhafi's authoritarian regime in 2011, the political situation has become more complex and today represents a stalemate among the various forces.

There are at least two rival governments in Libya today. The one headquartered in al Beida and led by Abdullah al-Thinni is the interim government of the east and is recognized by the House of Representatives (HoR) elected in 2014 and based in the eastern city of Tobruk. The HoR supports Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar who began a military campaign in 2014, eventually conquering much of eastern Libya with his coalition of armed groups named the Libyan National Army (LNA). Haftar was based in the United States in the 25 years leading up to the 2011 revolts in Libya. As a Qaddhafi-era general, Haftar

defected in 1987 and with the help of the CIA was relocated to the Washington, D.C. area. The HoR appointed Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar to be commander in chief of the then-main internationally recognized government in March 2015[1]. Although the HoR was elected legitimately in free and fair elections in 2014, the international community chose the UN as the main stage on which to undergo a set of negotiations, resulting in the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) that established a unity government in the capital, Tripoli. The Presidency Council (PC), formed by nine members, became the highest authority in the country upon the establishment of the agreement.

Fayez al Serraj was named the Chairman of the Presidency Council, making him the Prime Minister of Libya and the head of the Government of National Accord (GNA); both bodies are headquartered in Tripoli. Despite the LPA having signatures from both eastern and western figures, the eastern-based HoR does not recognize the Tripoli-based government and the two are rivals. In addition to the east-west divide, the GNA has little power in Tripoli itself. When the GNA arrived in Tripoli in early 2016, it negotiated a coalition of armed groups to secure its headquarters and comprise a security force for Libya. Although these armed groups officially remain nominally-aligned to the GNA, it has become clear that the GNA cannot give commands to the militias. Instead, the main armed groups are committed to protecting the GNA in order to maintain the operations of a lucrative illicit economy, which has flourished in the past seven years. Not only in the capital but groups across the country have morphed into a hybrid of a militia and criminal network by controlling the smuggling routes for drugs, oil, and economic migrants coming from other African countries, as well as running holding centers – resembling prisons – for migrants at a profit.

Therefore, in the west there is a government without a security apparatus and a security apparatus that is not responsible to any legitimately elected body, allowing them to operate without

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[1] "Libyan parliament confirms Haftar as army chief", *Al Jazeera*, 2 March 2015.

considering human rights. The government cannot fulfill its duty of providing security for residents, therefore militias fill that role and make themselves untouchable. Meanwhile, the east is governed by Field Marshall Haftar in an authoritarian fashion with the aspiration to see all of Libya under his control. Although the LNA is a cohesive army, Haftar's army has few men and lacks resources. The east can be considered safer relative to the west in Libya, however, there remain serious security concerns for the population, including ongoing attacks from groups such as the Islamic State (IS).

International Actors in Libya Since 2011

The United Nations (UN) has adopted ambitious reconciliation plans focusing on the top-level political structure. The mindset has been that once the factions at the top agree on a system to share power and representation, they will garner support on the ground and weave a social fabric using enthusiasm around the new and united system of governance.

This top-down approach favored by the UN is not working for several reasons. Domestic actors who profit from the chaos have purposely stalled efforts of reconciliation, simultaneously carving out more powerful roles in society by providing security and services in a time when the central government was unable to. Another reason is that despite the UN's involvement in the conflict, Libya has not been a priority for strong western powers or even neighbors that should have a strong interest, such as Algeria. Weak agreements have been thrown together and failed to no surprise, due to a lack of urgency from neighbors and western powers to address the Libyan conflict – but also to the surprise of many given the direct consequence Libya's crisis has already had on Europe with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of migrants. A case-in-point is the insistence by the international community on the establishment of the GNA that was evidently weak from the beginning and lacked a strong security force.

Paradoxically, the over-involvement of other international actors backing certain leaders at the top is considered the largest contributor to the downward spiral of the Libyan conflict post-2011. The backing of Haftar by the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, while Qatar and Turkey supported other actors on the ground, created a situation in Libya in which there was no clear winner or loser. The result was Libyans were left without a functioning state.

An Alternative?

The idea of a bottom-up approach that recognizes the need for local authorities to play a major role in governance has been presented as more feasible given the fragmented situation. Federalism is not a viable solution, but rather for a system of transferring selected powers and responsibilities from the center to the periphery[2]. A ground-up approach may also be a more digestible idea for Libyans who increasingly view the UN with skepticism and feel betrayed by Western powers who intervened in the conflict in 2011 to overthrow Qaddhafi and then quickly abandoned the country. There are also groups who, because they were marginalized by the central government under Qaddhafi, resent the strong control of a central government and therefore favor high-level decentralization. Local authorities have already proven their ability to carry out governmental functions better than the central government since the collapse of the state in 2011, which has sparked optimism around such a system[3]. Finally, a bottom-up approach may be the only realistic way to undertake a specific project that is long overdue: establishing a cohesive Libyan identity.

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[2] K. Mezran, E. Miller, and E. Chace-Donahue, "The Potential for Decentralization in Libya", *MENASource*, Atlantic Council, 26 June 2017.

[3] "Municipalities seek to give themselves a loud and unified voice", *Libya Herald*, 30 July 2017.

Will National Identity Permit Decentralization?

Libya's history of Ottoman, Italian, and monarchic rule never allowed for the natural process of national identity formation. The two periods of Ottoman rule – totaling 250 years and interrupted by a 120-year gap after a coup – shared practices of governing the two governorates ("wilayets"), Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, as two administrative entities. The Ottomans also served the coastal areas with more attention and presence than inland areas. During Italian colonization from 1911-47, a third region of mostly desert, the Fezzan, was created in the south. The only time the three regions were governed as one administrative entity was during the period of Italo Balbo's government from 1934-39.

A Federal Monarchy under Idris I was established in December 1951, reflecting the preferences of the east and the British, which had grown adrift from the west. The initial task of the new government and elites should have been to bridge societal divisions and create a modern united Libya by instilling in the population a sense of national identity. King Idris was an honest and pious man but a reluctant monarch who did not rise to the task; he was more interested in religious issues than in the day-to-day administration of the country.

When Qaddhafi came to power in 1969, his visions for the country emphasized pan-Arabism and later pan-Africanism, purposely impeding the creation of strong state institutions that could rally Libyans around a national vision. This strategy allowed Qaddhafi to stay in power but failed at the project of creating a Libyan identity. A tangible sense of "Libyanhood" did emerge by the beginning of the millennium due to urbanization and continuous interaction among the population, however, weak state institutions remained an impediment to national identity formation, which was evident in the 2011 revolts.

Given the fragmentation that began well before the regime of Qaddhafi, it is necessary to address whether a bottom-up approach is more suitable for the Libyan situation at this time.

De Facto Decentralization Since 2011

Before the end of the Qaddhafi regime and collapse of the egg-shell-like state institutions in 2011, communities across Libya varied in the level of quality of life due to Qaddhafi's favoritism and manipulation of regions and tribes. The immediate environment in the post-revolution era negatively affected even the most favored; all Libyans saw their country collapse into chaos and war, which affected education, hospitals, and access to basic resources. The government entities on the national level, in both the east and west, underperformed in the functions of delivering services and providing security in the post-revolt period. Out of necessity, since 2011, communities across Libya have relied on local armed groups and local councils for security and basic services. During this time a number of municipalities have performed better than any central government.

Since the local elections in 2014, many municipalities have taken the initiative in each of their communities as well as co-ordinated with one another to resolve issues. Representatives from municipalities have convened dozens of times since 2014 to discuss issues of migration, oil flows and revenue shortages, to agree on cease fires, to protect archaeological and heritage sites, and to submit statements as one united voice condemning terrorism and addressing other grievances. Meetings have ranged from two cities convening to resolve a unique issue to a gathering of over 107 representatives who[4], in March 2018, called for a united Libya and formed a committee offering to facilitate dialogue between the rival government factions[5]. In cases in which communities are not happy with the performance of their leaders, members of the community have used

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[4] "Kabar and Batten El-Jabal delegations agree on a set of mechanisms to address disputes in Nafusa Mountains", United Nations Support Missions in Libya, 29 November 2017.

[5] S. Zaptia, "Municipality leaders call for Judicial High Council to takeover running of country – if HoR and HSC fail to reach consensus within 30 days", *Libya Herald,* 19 March 2018.

the peaceful process of voting or establishing an interim leader to resolve the situation[6]. A notable reconciliation took place between the cities of Zintan and Misrata in April 2018[7]. The two cities were long-time rivals and the agreement came as a pleasant surprise to most. The municipalities have also created joint security forces to tackle specific rivalries and have formed committees and associations to address specific issues, such as damages from armed clashes and justice for criminals

Municipalities in Libya have faced large obstacles that have affected their performance to different degrees. Some municipalities have maintained the administration of primary services and oversight of territory, even within the cloudy legal framework. Others struggle to operate due to lack of sufficient funding from the central government. Moreover, tribal and militia dominance that appeared after 2011 creates serious roadblocks for some municipal councils to conduct local politics[8]. This is especially true in the east, where many of the elected municipal heads have been replaced by members of the army loyal to Khalifa Haftar.

Despite the difficulties, many municipal leaders have gained the confidence of the population they serve. A third of Libyans felt their municipal council was more legitimate than tribal leaders, civil society, and parliamentarians in regard to representing their communities, according to a survey done by the International Republican Institute in late 2016[9]. Moreover, local governments have been a more reliable political contact through which international aid organizations have interacted with the population in order to deliver services and supplies. In other words, international organizations have navigated the political fragmentation by working directly with smaller

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[6] H. Najjair, "Vote of no-confidence against Hay Andulus Mayor", *The Libya Observer,* 17 February 2018.

[7] "UNSMIL welcomes reconciliation agreements in support of peace and stability in Libya", United Nations Support Mission in Libya, 27 April 2018.

[8] K. Mezran, E. Miller, and E. Chace-Donahue (2017).

[9] "Libyan Municipal Council Research", International Republic Institute (presentation by the Center for Insights in Survey Research), 2016.

communities in order to ensure aid is not impeded due to political gridlock. Many of the mandates of locally elected figures will expire in 2018, prompting some local councils to hold elections again, as the town of Zawiya did in May 2018[10].

While municipalities have had to adapt to the chaotic situation, they have begun to resemble some features of a decentralized state. However, the formal process was never engaged and therefore municipalities lack consistency in their operations across Libya. Each municipality worked with resources and knowledge they had access to, but with few regulations and little guidance. On a national level, the concept has not been comprehensively or formally addressed.

Law 59

The only hint to the theme of decentralization is in Law 59, which was officially adopted in 2012. However, the rise in violence in 2014 and the continued intimidation from armed groups that control a lot of territory in Libya has impeded any consistent implementation of decentralization laid out, albeit with many holes, in the document[11].

Law 59 established over 100 municipalities made up of elected municipal councils spread across all three regions of the country. The municipalities of each province are led by a "governor" who oversees the provincial municipality; while a "deputy" oversees the administrative units. The mayor is the head of each municipal council and is an elected position. At the highest level of government in Libya, the state will have a Minister of Local Government.

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[10] "Remarks of SRSG Ghassan Salamé to the United Nations Security Council on the Situation in Libya", United Nations Support Mission in Libya, 21 May 2018.
[11] "Rapid Diagnostic on the Situation of Local Governance and Local Development in Libya: Synthesis Report", United Nations Development Programme Libya, November 2015.

Law 59 focuses heavily on delegating administrative duties such as urban planning, budget planning, creating public recreation areas, and providing water to the municipalities. The Law fails to mention how a police force would function in each municipality. Sharing political powers or judicial authority is vague or non-existent in the language. There is neither much mention of political powers nor a mandate to collect taxes. In other words, as the only effort toward decentralization in Libya, Law 59 does not include mechanisms for transferring pieces of political power essential for an effective decentralized system.

Decentralization in a Rentier State

The design of decentralization in Libya would look different from that of Tunisia, Syria, and Iraq due to history of identity, the nature of the conflict, and the reality of a rentier state economy. Many would like to see in the constitution a guarantee that every Libyan be endowed an equal share of oil wealth. Simple redistribution, however, would undermine decentralization because the central state would continue to have direct power over the population. The only way for municipalities to wield true political power and make independent decisions is if they also have a budget to build, lead, and govern.

According to Law 59, the sole source of income for the municipalities is transfers from the central government that are meant to cover only operating costs. Municipalities should be given money exceeding the minimum amount necessary to keep the lights on. Municipalities should be given the right in the constitution to equal shares of oil revenue based on the number of inhabitants in the municipality. Each municipality will define its own budget, operating costs, salaries, and social welfare for its population.

There should be basic guidelines and a framework that the municipality will follow. For example, there should be a cap on the portion of the budget allocated to salaries in order to avoid corruption. Additionally, municipalities should have minimum

requirements for investing in education and health care for their residents. The populations in each municipality will be given the right to vote on the major new spending proposals. Municipalities will also be required to report on their budgets to the central government and undergo annual audits and visits from inspectors.

Finally, the local governments should have the freedom and encouragement to establish other sources of income. However, the amount of money coming from the oil rents to set up other flows of income – such as starting costs for businesses – will be limited. Without financial resources, political decentralization will be weak. Rather than simply redistributing the wealth, this system creates a financial mechanism catered to a rentier state for true decentralization.

Necessary Components to Successful Decentralization

Other forms of government for Libya were considered. For example, there was a strong move for federalism in 2012 by a small but vocal faction in the east, headed by Abu Bakr Buera. The Libyans in the west rejected federalism, viewing it as an attempt by eastern elites to monopolize the country's oil wealth – much of which is in the east – and secede from the west. In a 2011 survey by the International Republican Institute, only 7 percent of respondents in the east indicated preference for a federalist system in Libya[12]. The federalists lost credit with many Libyans as they quickly resorted to violence. Moreover, there is the lingering memory from 1951-63 when Libyans tried federalism with very negative results[13].

A national rift developed over federalism as well as divisions

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[12] "Survey of Public Opinion in Eastern Libya", International Republication Institute and Shabakat Corporation, 2011.

[13] R.B. St John, *Libya: From Colony to Revolution (Short Histories)*, Oneworld Publications, 2012; D. Vanderwalle, *Libya since Independence: Oil and State-building*, Cornell University Press, 1998.

within the federalism bloc. Nonetheless, the federalists were strong enough to gain seats in the 2014 parliamentary elections and maintain the pressure on the government in Tripoli to recognize their interests and concerns.

Today, the population centers of Libya's regions are too fractured to allow for federalism to serve as a possible meaningful solution for the country's divisions.

Decentralization should be rigorously considered as an approach to ameliorate the fragmentation and impunity in Libya. Still, there are obstacles to this bottom-up approach. An important factor is whether decentralization can be formally implemented without an established and strong constitution. Libya's draft constitution, approved by the Libyan Constitution Drafting Assembly in July 2017, does not clearly express the duties and responsibilities of the various organs. To increase the likelihood of success of a decentralization process, the constitution should contain a clear national vision and legal framework for decentralization.

Alternatively, the UN-backed GNA could bypass the constitutional issue by releasing a law by decree to delineate an implementation plan for the decentralization process. An executive order calling for decentralization could then be ratified, rejected, or modified by an eventual legitimately-elected parliament.

Libya could consider a framework like that of neighboring Tunisia striving to achieve a unitary state with a high level of decentralization. The Tunisian method unifies all local governments in one legal framework and clarifies how local legislators can carry out laws while the decentralization process continues. An important component of the Tunisian method is that the newest draft of the Code on Local Authorities from 2017 includes provisions which make the local councils more financially independent and ensures they will have enough money to run basic functions.

Conclusion

The prospect of decentralization is still untapped in the region and has recently garnered attention as a possible method to addressing the conflict in Libya (as well as other MENA countries). Decentralization must be a process; one that begins with a strong central government which delegates authority, power, and funds to municipalities in a consistent manner. Although many municipalities in Libya have been successful in delivering services to their communities in a time of chaos and war, the current operation is problematic. Because they formed independently and in the absence of a strong central government, the municipal councils are not responsible to any higher power and little interaction exists between the two. A clear, legal code must be adopted, allowing for an immediate increase in funding and have a formalized relationship with the central government in order for the process of decentralization to succeed. The decentralization process, like Tunisia's, must be ventured in a unity context. Only under this framework will domestic actors have a chance at restoring a functioning state in Libya.

4. Decentralization in the Syrian Context

Faysal Itani, Emily Burchfield

The Syrian uprising is multidimensional, but above all it is a revolt by the periphery – geographic but also social and economic – against the policies and behavior of the central government in Damascus. Syria is also a religiously, ethnically, and tribally diverse country, presenting a legitimacy and identity challenge to the state. It is therefore worth examining whether decentralization could be an effective conflict resolution formula for Syria. This chapter will analyze trends in decentralization in Syria and factors likely to increase its usefulness as a conflict resolution tool. It then places these in the context of the war itself. Our analysis suggests that the balance of power along with structural and agency problems make decentralization an unpromising vehicle for ending the Syrian conflict.

A Brief History of Decentralization in Syria

Despite the Baath regime's authoritarian character, influential tribes, families, and religious leaders have tended to enjoy a degree of autonomy even in pre-war Syria. Historically, however, this was contingent on loyalty and close engagement with a strong central government in Damascus, which used these arrangements to co-opt local elites. Under Hafez al-Assad, elites in the country were absorbed into the bureaucracy through

appointments[1], and that made them intermediaries of the state. In turn, the latter provided services across the country and served as its largest employer and investor. Hafez al-Assad's strategy thereby reduced tribal leaders' autonomy and authority over their constituencies, who became more reliant on the central government for jobs and services.

While Hafez co-opted the suburbs and countryside, Bashar al-Assad's economic liberalization policies prioritized tourism and services in urban areas, marginalizing these constituencies particularly in the north, east, and south. The 2011 protests were driven in part by this marginalization[2], which accompanied governance failures, widespread corruption, and growing political and economic inequality between cities and the periphery.

In August 2011, to appease popular protests the regime issued Legislative Decree 107[3], decentralizing Syria along governorate lines to put more power "in the hands of the people." The decree devolved power and responsibility at two tiers: first, it allowed locally elected councils to finance and implement local development projects; and second, it allowed provincial councils to deal with issues affecting governorates. A regime-appointed governor, however, would ensure that local efforts fell in line with national strategies.

While this legislation might appear to support unprecedented decentralization, it was crafted to ensure regime control as shown by the primacy of a centrally appointed governor and by the establishment of a "Supreme Council of Local Administration" headed by the Prime Minister. This would be responsible for coordinating the transfer of administrative functions and endowed with the power to legislate and regulate the

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[1] H. Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. 206-207.

[2] A. Fielding-Smith and L. Saigol, "Uprising exposes Syria's economic weaknesses", *Financial Times*, 26 April 2011.

[3] "Legislative Decree 107", Local Administration Law 2011, Parliament of the Syrian Arab Republic, 23 August 2011, http://parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=5575&cat=4390.

decentralization process. The decision to emphasize regional over local governance in the law was strategic: communication and coordination along regional lines is historically weak in Syria, while the real power dynamics lie at the locality level. Thus, while Decree 107 transferred a measure of fiscal and administrative authority to the local level, by design it did little to actually empower local governance.

As protests escalated and an armed opposition emerged, the regime lost large swathes of Syria. In the absence of state authority, local councils became the primary mode of governance in these opposition areas. Interestingly, they adopted Decree 107 as a legitimate framework despite rejecting the regime behind it.

Decentralization in Wartime Syria

Turkey's Protectorate and Opposition Areas in the North

The Turkish-backed opposition is implanting its own decentralization measures with Turkish support. It has adopted a modified form of Decree 107, allowing the local council structure to provide much-needed goods and services[4]. The opposition's formal "interim government," based in Turkey, includes a ministry to oversee these local councils. Turkey has political and security interests in northwest Syria, and therefore supports not only the armed opposition but also decentralized governance institutions that it hopes will stabilize the area, enable refugees to return, deepen Turkish diplomatic leverage and soft power, and safeguard against Kurdish expansion.

Turkey's efforts have had mixed results. Rather than empower localities to unite and bring leverage against the central government in Damascus, Turkish and other foreign aid in the northwest have increased opposition infighting over resources. Local

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[4] S. Araabi, "Syria's Decentralization Roadmap", *Sada*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 23 March 2017.

decentralization has flourished, but broader coordination has stalled.

The Kurds

During the uprising, the regime lost control over much of eastern Syria to Arab tribal populations[5]. Many tribal leaders, however, sided with the government to preserve their privileges as intermediaries. This rift further eroded local government legitimacy and community cohesion. Eventually, calculating that Arab opposition was more dangerous than Kurdish separatism, the regime withdrew but allowed the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its military wing, the People's Protection Units (YPG), to take control of northern cities including Kobane, Afrin, Manbij, and most of Hasakah province.

The PYD was largely spared regime violence and later benefited from US backing rooted in the collective war on the Islamic State (IS). This dynamic helped the PYD set up and dominate local governance systems comprised of local councils and assemblies throughout the Kurdish "cantons". According to PYD leadership, each canton has its own constitution, government, parliament, courts, and laws[6]. Additionally, the PYD has established a network of civil councils throughout Arab-majority areas cleared of IS. However, Arab locals have reported that the PYD excludes representatives who oppose the party, and Kurds dominate leadership positions in governance and security[7]. Thus, while decentralization institutions and legislative framework are being developed in eastern Syria, power simultaneously remains highly centralized in the PYD.

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[5] K. Khaddour and K. Mazur, "Eastern Expectations: The Changing Dynamics in Syria's Tribal Regions", *Sada*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 28 February 2017.

[6] "A Transformations Process From Dictatorship to Democracy", Information File, Kurdistan National Congress, May 2014.

[7] R. Khalaf, "Governing Rojava: Layers of Legitimacy in Syria", Chatham House, December 2016, pp. 11-13.

The "Assad Statelet"

The Assad regime has recovered military control of the western spine of Syria, stretching from the Nassib border crossing with Jordan in the south, up along the Mediterranean coast to Latakia, and branching out into Aleppo, retaining its capital in Damascus. Within this zone of control, the central government has often sought to boost public goods and services such as bread, education, security, health, electricity, water, and jobs; it remains the largest employer in this territory[8]. Service provision is an important source of regime legitimacy, so it must keep localities dependent on it. Thus, the decentralization processes outlined by Decree 107 exist mostly "on paper" in regime-held territory.

The more meaningful power dynamics fall in the informal space between the regime and its network of local intermediaries, which comprises mostly influential families and business elites. The influence of these relationships has expanded during the war as the regime's capacity for power projection decreased and its reliance on these parties deepened. Because they are not officially employed by the regime, these intermediaries are able to advocate for their communities with aid organizations while simultaneously facilitating their own business interests using ties to the regime. At the same time, the regime asserts influence through these intermediaries and wins local support or acquiescence. The regime could formalize these power structures by granting loyal local elites greater authority over their communities, though it may see less need to do so as its military situation improves.

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[8] J. Yazigi, "No Going Back: Why Decentralisation is the Future for Syria", European Council on Foreign Relations, September 2016.

Decentralization as a Way Out of Conflict?

Some Conditions for Success

Before analyzing the Syrian case in greater detail, it is useful to identify conditions that may make decentralization more useful in conflict resolution. According to a United Nations University study, the ability to implement decentralization is driven by *demand* from citizens and the central government for devolved power and politics, and *design*, or the top-down agenda for implementation[9].

Demand is a fairly straightforward concept: decentralization cannot "work" as a tool for conflict resolution if the parties affected do not want it, will not participate in it, or will actively resist it.

Design is a more complex matter. Poorly conceived or implemented decentralization programs not only fail to achieve desired outcomes but may also entrench corrupt practices and the power of patronage networks and warlords, contribute to political and economic inequality across the country, and/or exacerbate governance problems. Due to these risks, it is useful to identify the important components of design. According to a United Nations report, these include legal and institutional precedent, fiscal decentralization, and capacity development in human resources and civic participation[10].

Demand in the Syrian Context

In Syria, *demand* for decentralization varies widely among regions, localities, and the conflict's belligerents. Polling data shows that 55 percent of survey respondents in opposition areas

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[9] J. Öjendal and A. Dellnäs, *The Imperative of Good Local Governance: Challenges for the Next Decade of Decentralization,* New York, United Nations University Press, 2013, pp. 7-8.

[10] "Decentralization: Conditions for Success, Lessons from Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States", New York, United Nations, 2000.

favor decentralization, compared with only 29 percent in regime-held areas[11]. The opposition's Syrian National Coalition (SNC) has proposed administrative decentralization along regional lines, but only if the regime leadership is removed. Interestingly, armed opposition groups have shown little interest in decentralization despite the suffering the central government has inflicted on them.

Many Kurdish leaders endorse decentralization[12], seeking to formalize the autonomy they gained over the course of the war. They are aware, however, that formal autonomy could provoke a Turkish or regime backlash. Regardless, Kurds are a small and historically marginalized minority in Syria in a very particular situation defined largely by their alliance with the United States. Unlike some 90 percent of Syrians, they are not Arab. Kurdish distance from the central government would not suffice to alter the major conflict between regime and large Arab opposition.

The most powerful local actor in this conflict is the regime. Because it is winning the war against the opposition and enjoys strong backing from allies, it is difficult to imagine successful decentralization without its consent. Regime ideology and rhetoric consistently emphasize returning lost territory and populations to the "bosom of the state". It has shown no interest in a political compromise that would dilute government authority. The regime likely realizes it currently lacks the capacity to control all of Syria but sees this as a temporary situation to be resolved over years if necessary. It fought this war precisely to preserve its hold on all of Syria. To the extent that the regime has delegated authority, it has done so to loyal clients and proxies. The regime has not enfranchised any local populations.

The regime will almost certainly reject decentralization. The regime believes much of its own rhetoric including uncompromised national unity and the state's overwhelming role in

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[11] "Syria: Opinions and Attitudes on Federalism, Decentralization, and the Experience of the Democratic Self-Administration", *The Day After*, 25 April 2016.
[12] "Syrian Kurds say they will 'chart roadmap to decentralized Syria' with Damascus", *Reuters*, 28 July 2018.

Syrian life. It may seem odd to outside observers, but Bashar al-Assad and his allies do believe they are the legitimate rulers of Syria, and that there would have been no revolution (which they would call a conspiracy) had hostile foreign powers not intervened. More complicated is the paradoxical role of identity: the regime is highly conscious of its minority Alawite (a sect of Shia Islam) character in a majority-Sunni country. It understands that making power divisible implicitly legitimizes identities other than the strict national one constructed by the Baath, such as ethnicity or sect. By this logic, Syria's Alawites could justify controlling their own affairs in Alawite areas, but an Alawite family like the Assads would have no legitimate claims on the state in a largely-Sunni country. Precisely because it is a minority it cannot delegate authority.

External analysts and policy-makers often cite the regime's resource constraints as a reason the regime will be forced to decentralize[13]. That analysis is not useful here; the regime does not appear to see these constraints as incentives to decentralize power. Indeed, in the face of exhausted resources, the regime has managed to extend control throughout Syria using brutal but cost-effective tactics, such as siege, mass slaughter of civilians, demographic maneuvering through forced population exchanges, and chemical weapons attacks. Demand for decentralization is driven by the regime's own calculus, not external parties' analysis, and resource pressures will therefore not drive demand.

The armed opposition is more difficult to analyze since no single actor has agency. However, there seems to be limited enthusiasm for decentralization. Most Syrians are the product of the state education system within the regime's ideological climate. The armed groups generally want to overthrow the Assad regime and control the state themselves, not decentralize it. As Sunni Arabs, most retain an indivisible national identity that

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[13] J. Dobbins, P. Gordon, and J. Martini, "A Peace Plan for Syria III," RAND, 2017.

leaves little room for "diluting" the Syrian state and its identity. The numbers show, however, a not insignificant portion of opposition members might accept decentralization[14] perhaps as an alternative to complete defeat and control by regime forces, now that the rebels are losing the war.

International "Demand" in the International Context

The Syrian conflict is only partly a domestic one – nearly all Syrian parties depend heavily on external military, economic, and diplomatic support. External actors therefore play a central role in rejecting or advancing solutions. They can act as champions or spoilers of a decentralization agreement, and there is unlikely to be convergence over this question.

Russia is in Syria to restore the Syrian state's authority and ideally its legitimacy. It is not invested in empowering local communities, though it has supported concessions to them to de-escalate local fighting and free up regime resources. The state sees itself as sovereign everywhere, and thus often violates these agreements. These are in any case hyper-local arrangements that delegate little real authority to locals. They also reflect warfare necessities and the regime's limited resources. The Russian appetite for decentralization may exceed the regime's, though perhaps not by much, and it is a tactical issue. It should be said that Russia lacks the leverage to impose these preferences on the regime; pushing meaningful political change in Syria would risk the fall of the Assad regime and hence a blow to President Putin's image as a diplomatic powerhouse and a boon to American interests in the region which Russia cannot afford. Assad appears aware of this dynamic, which in part explains Russia's repeated failure to keep the regime in check.

Iran is the foreign power most invested and present in Syria. Like Russia, it entered the conflict to secure Bashar al-Assad's survival, but its conflict with Israel adds an additional dimension

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[14] "Syria: Opinions and Attitudes on Federalism, Decentralization, and the Experience of the Democratic Self-Administration", *The Day After*, April 2016.

to its mission. Iran is less interested in governance arrangements in Syria, and more interested in regime deference to its military project. In some parts, it has seized and garrisoned territory directly, rendering governance issues between the state and localities irrelevant. The regime has generally accommodated Iranian strategic priorities, meaning Iran has little incentive to upset the *status quo* through decentralization and may oppose it.

Israel is a less important but still significant actor in Syria. Its focus is geostrategic like Iran's and centered on countering the latter. It will support whatever faction along its border with Syria is most willing and able to resist Iranian encroachment. If that falls under a formal decentralization agreement, Israel can accept that, but – unlike Russia, Iran, and others – it has no real means of bringing that about. It would be less interested in what happens elsewhere in the country in terms of local governance.

Turkey would oppose any arrangement that advances Kurdish autonomy. To the extent that it has supported local government and decentralization from Damascus, it has been to prop up local allies as a bulwark against Kurdish expansion. Turkey will view decentralization through the prism of the Kurdish problem and oppose any framework that brings the Kurds closer to de facto autonomy, including through military force.

Current US efforts seem focused on seeking Russian guarantees against Iranian entrenchment or possibly a commitment to reversing Iranian gains. More broadly, however, the United States continues to support a political resolution between Assad and the opposition. Some influential US thinkers have advanced a de facto partition of Syria – an extreme form of decentralization. The United States would support a decentralization formula that ends the conflict in something short of a total victory for Assad (and therefore Iran). Because it does not back the opposition, however, or fight Assad, it has almost no leverage in this negotiation. Some US officials continue to claim military leverage is not necessary, as the regime has "no choice" but to agree to cede authority due to its own resource constraints under war and sanctions. There is no evidence that this is true.

"Design" in the Syrian Context

Without certain prerequisites, a decentralization process is not useful in conflict resolution. If we assume precedent to be one such prerequisite, the Syrian case looks rather unpromising. Decentralization in Syria technically has legal precedent in the regime's Decree 107, and institutional precedent can be found in the local councils and decentralized structures that emerged throughout the country over the course of the war. This advantage should not be overstated, however. Decree 107 grants wider powers to unelected, centrally-appointed governors, and ultimately leaves the implementation of decentralization at the mercy of the regime-controlled Supreme Council of Local Administration (it also fails to account for the degree of autonomy gained by the Kurds in eastern Syria). Thus, while decentralization does have legal and institutional precedent in Syria, it would require substantial modification in letter and compliance spirit to secure real opposition agreement.

Fiscal decentralization presents another challenge. Decree 107 allows local councils to collect and allocate funds for local development projects. However, Syrian localities simply lack such a fiscal base. Syria's economy has been decimated by the massive human toll of the conflict and damage to productive factors for economic activity, damaging capital stock and resulting in a cumulative GDP loss of some $226 billion between 2011 and 2016[15]. Additionally, the geographic distribution of Syria's resources and trade hubs could result in uneven economic development. This could worsen socioeconomic inequality, engendering further resentment and division, and undermining conflict resolution. Some experts have proposed a system which distributes centrally controlled resources by region and district according to population shares. However, in the likely scenario that the Assad regime controls the central government, it would probably not treat areas currently or formerly associated with

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[15] "The World Bank in Syrian Arab Republic", *The World Bank,* last updated 16 April 2018.

the opposition equally to loyalist areas or elites. Furthermore, these funds would likely be siphoned by regime intermediaries. Effective fiscal decentralization seems unlikely.

The final condition for effective decentralization, capacity development, is inextricably linked to demand. Decentralization on paper is meaningless absent a capable force for implementation. If Syria's warring parties agreed on decentralization, the regime may set up the trappings of local government and a legislative framework, but intentionally keep local actors weak and ineffective to prevent a potential challenge to regime rule. That said, capacity building could be undertaken by the international powers present in Syria's "zones of control," as is currently happening in Turkey's protectorate in the northwest, and areas with a US presence in the Kurdish-controlled east, though this obviously accounts for only a portion of Syria. Foreign powers, however, may also continue to work to undermine certain parties' local capabilities.

Conclusion

To be a useful pathway to conflict resolution, enough Syrians would need to see decentralization as a solution to the grievances driving the conflict. Key foreign players would need to accept it as well. Even if those criteria are met, decentralization's prospects would be much improved by precedent, fiscal decentralization, and local capacity development.

The trouble with the Syrian case is that these elements are either absent or weak, starting with demand. The Syrian opposition, which has plenty of reason to want to disengage from the central government, is steeped in rigid beliefs about national unity, as demonstrated by their refusal to entertain the idea of Kurdish autonomy. Syrian minorities, including but not limited to the Alawites, find security in belonging to a larger collective.

The Kurdish PYD is really seeking de facto autonomy[16],

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[16] E. Francis, "Wary of U.S. ally, Syrian Kurds look to Damascus for talks",

which has the potential to provoke hostility from the regime, the opposition, and Turkey alike. Kurds also represent a small fraction of Syria's population, rendering their demands alone less relevant. Their leverage in any negotiation will also seriously decline with the inevitable withdrawal of US troops from Kurdish territory.

The regime is likely to be especially hostile to decentralization, which undermines its narrative as a national government along with Syrians' dependence on the state. Since the regime is winning the war, it is understandable that it would reject a "solution" that rules out its main goal: restoring absolute control of all of Syria. Western claims that the regime has no choice but to devolve authority are overly materialist and underestimate the state's resourcefulness, patience, and commitment. Further, regime demand for decentralization is a product of the regime's own calculus – what Western policymakers believe does not matter.

The nature of the Syrian conflict requires that any solution through decentralization enjoy acceptance from several key external actors with different, often conflicting interests. The example of the Taef agreement that ended the Lebanese Civil War in 1990 demonstrates this is not impossible, but in Syria, the constellation of actors, their alignments, and the imbalance of power in the regime's favor may rule out such consensus.

Finally, in Syria, certain prerequisites of successful decentralization are absent or weak. There is no precedent of meaningful delegation of authority to empowered local populations, despite the regime's history of co-opting local elites as allies and intermediaries of the state. The regime itself as well as the war's effects are serious obstacles to efficient, sufficient, and equitable fiscal decentralization, especially, but not only, in opposition-held areas. Capacity development is more promising but is more likely to succeed in areas controlled by foreign states (and indeed because of such control) than in regime territory.

Decentralization is not, therefore, a promising vehicle for conflict resolution in the Syrian context. The most powerful Syrian party is the one least likely to agree to it, and foreign intervention presents a major complicating factor. A prolonged stalemate on the ground and consequent adaptation by foreign parties could well improve the prospects, but both situations seem exceedingly unlikely.

5. Iraq: From Fragmentation to (De)Centralization?

Andrea Plebani

In the last fifteen years, Iraq has been continuously described as on the brink of dissolution: its social fabric too diverse and fragmented to sustain a system devoid of a center of gravity able to impose its will over a wide array of competing internal and external power centers. Yet despite the many tragedies that have struck the "Land of the Two Rivers", the Iraqi State remains a crucial point of reference for millions of citizens, demonstrating a resilience and support for the state that caught off guard even some of its most fervent adherents. Indeed, neither the civil war nor the brutal occupation of huge parts of the country by the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) and the many flaws that characterized the post-2003 order succeeded in tearing Iraq apart.

Nevertheless, the challenges Baghdad must face remain daunting. While often overshadowed by security and geopolitical concerns, center-periphery relations are a factor that could prove crucial for the fate of the fragile democracy built on the ashes of the former Baathist regime. The situation is well symbolized by the vitality of the debate over devolution, which pervaded the history of the Iraqi polity and rose to prominence again from 2003 onwards. This analysis aims to delineate the features of the decentralization movements active in post-Saddam Iraq, with particular emphasis on the southern and central governorates. Areas which, in contrast with the aspirations of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), receive only limited and sporadic coverage, especially in the West.

Local Decentralization: Antidote to Authoritarian Centralization or Shortcut to Fragmentation?

The federal nature of the Iraqi state is one of the pillars of the constitution adopted in October 2005. Despite significant internal opposition – especially amongst some nationalist circles that considered it a threat to the unity of Iraq – a federal system was deemed fundamental to healing the wounds left by the policies enacted by previous authoritarian (and overtly centralist) regimes.

In accordance with this vision, the new Iraq has been built on a multi-layered administrative system based on a federal government, regions, and governorates that are characterized by a set of shared and exclusive functions as well as by different levels of autonomy. While the federal government is recognized as the top of the ladder and exercises *de facto* full authority over the country's governorates, the constitution endows regions with extremely high levels of self-determination. This status is demonstrated by the KRI, the country's only region that boasts its own charter, parliament, president, internal security forces, and delegations abroad. Other regions, if created and recognized by formal mechanisms, could one day enjoy the same level of autonomy. Indeed, the constitution envisions the possibility of creating new regional units and modifying the country's (internal) administrative boundaries[1], laying the foundations for an extremely fluid system specifically designed to avoid the

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[1] According to Article 119 of the constitution "one or more governorates (*provinces*) have the right to organize into a region based on a request to be voted on in a referendum submitted in one of the following two methods: a) a request by one-third of the council members of each governorate intending to form a region; b) a request by one-tenth of the voters in each of the governorates intending to form a region." The 10 percent threshold required by Article 119 can be secured also through a two-step procedure envisioned by Regions law no. 13 of 2008. If Iraq's Independent Electoral Commission (IIEC) receives a bid signed by 2 percent of the electorate, it can formally request the Iraqi government to organize a collection of the additional 8 percent requested before a referendum is organized. B. Isakhan and P.E. Mulherin, "Basra's Bid for Autonomy: Peaceful Progress toward a Decentralized Iraq", *Middle East Journal*, vol. 72, no. 2, 2018, p. 271.

return of Saddam-like practices, but in effect also offering the different facets of Iraqi society with forms of local self-determination potentially able to strip Baghdad of most of its authority.

It is within this framework that, especially during the height of the civil war (2005-2008), the decentralization debate regarded federal schemes as being no more than attempts to enact a masked (or "soft") partition of the country along sectarian lines. Amongst them, the best known is the tripartite model usually associated with former US Vice President Joseph Biden and President Emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations Leslie Gelb. Working from the assumption that Iraq's social fabric could be clustered according to its main ethno-sectarian affiliations (Arab Shia, Arab Sunni, and Kurdish), the plan aimed at creating a symmetrical federal system made up of three largely autonomous macro-regions. As explained by the two authors in an editorial published in 2006 in *The New York Times*:

> the idea, as in Bosnia, is to maintain a united Iraq by decentralizing it, giving each ethno-religious group – Kurd, Sunni Arab and Shiite Arab – room to run its own affairs, while leaving the central government in charge of common interests […] The Kurdish, Sunni and Shiite regions would each be responsible for their own domestic laws, administration and internal security. The central government would control border defense, foreign affairs and oil revenues. Baghdad would become a federal zone, while densely populated areas of mixed populations would receive both multi-sectarian and international police protection[2].

Partially in line with this vision, albeit formally launched before the Biden-Gelb proposal, was the "Shiastan project" upheld by the late Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq chairman Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim. Driven by frustration at the multiple crises afflicting the "new Iraq" and by the hatred fostered by brutal attacks on the Shia

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[2] J.R. Biden and L.H. Gelb, "Unity through Autonomy in Iraq", *The New York Times,* 1 May 2006. See also J.R. Biden, *Senate Concurrent Resolution Expressing the Sense of Congress on Federalism in Iraq,* United States Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 110th Congress, 1st Session, vol. 153, no. 91, 7 June 2007, pp. S7389-S7390.

community, the initiative aimed to replicate the success enjoyed by the KRI by uniting Iraq's Shia-majority governorates under a single region. The plan's rationale rested on a series of pressing political, economic, and security considerations. With the creation of a new region, the management of internal security would have been conferred upon local security forces considered better positioned than the nascent Iraqi security forces to quell the spiral of violence that was enflaming the central and southern governorates (as the Kurdish *peshmerga* did in the north). Equally important was the idea that a regional government would have been much more sympathetic to local needs than a federal one, and better positioned to exploit the huge economic potential of the area[3].

Less well-known, if better articulated and attuned to the diversity of the Iraqi social fabric, was the five-region model aimed at tempering sectarian considerations with the diversity of the Iraqi socio-economic and political fabric. The plan was intended to overcome the asymmetry of the Iraqi federal system through the creation of a series of regional units held together not only by sectarian loyalties but also by distinctive socio-political, cultural and economic bonds. Instead of a system made up of a single region (the KRI) and several governorates, the project proposed the creation of five regions: i) a Kurdistan region in the north, ii) an Arab Sunni-majority region centered around Mosul and the upper Tigris and Euphrates Valleys, iii) a Greater Baghdad region, iv) an Arab Shia-majority region encompassing the Middle Euphrates and its holy cities, and iv) a region clustered around Basra and the other southern governorates[4].

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[3] R. Visser, *Debating devolution in Iraq*, Middle East Research and Information Project Report, 10 March 2008, p. 1; R. Visser, "The Two Regions of Southern Iraq", in R. Visser and G. Stansfield, (eds.), A*n Iraq of Its Regions: Cornerstones of a Federal Democracy*?, London, Hurst Publishers Ltd, 2007, pp. 27-50; International Crisis Group, *Shiite Politics in Iraq: the Role of the Supreme Council*, Middle East Report, no. 70, 2007, p. 18.

[4] M. al-Rubaye, "Federalism, Not Partition," *The Washington Post*, 18 January 2008; M. al-Rubaye, *Democratic Regionalism*, paper presented at the workshop *Où va l'Irak*, Institut Kurde de Paris, 5 March 2004, http://www.institutkurde.org/

Despite their apparent theoretical purity and the support for them in some Western circles, these schemes fell largely on deaf Iraqi ears when not met by stiff internal opposition. Not only were they widely perceived as detrimental to Iraq's unity (at a time when Iraqi nationalism was making a significant comeback), they also overlooked the inherent fragmentation of Iraq's main ethno-sectarian communities. Furthermore, given the mixed nature of important parts of the Iraqi social fabric, even a "soft" partition along sectarian lines would have resulted in mass deportations as well as a series of endless conflicts over the definition of internal borders. Finally, overestimating the importance of sectarian affiliations, they neglected the important role that local particularism always played in Iraqi politics. This factor would have made the fortune of a series of competing regional schemes mainly centered around the southern governorate of Basra.

Local Particularism as an Alternative: Basra as the Epicenter of Southern Regional Schemes

Diverging from "soft partition" plans, regional projects that focused on Basra had little to do with overt ethno-sectarian considerations. While part of an overwhelming Arab Shia majority-area, Basra has always been characterized by a series of distinctive socio-economic and cultural features that set it apart from Iraq's Arab-Shia heartland. Its key geopolitical position, longstanding commercial activity, and its ties with key regional and international players contributed to the emergence of a series of autonomist/independentist schemes whose roots can be traced to well before the foundation of the modern Iraqi polity[5].

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conferences/ou_va_l_irak/Mowaffak+al+Rubaie.html. See also L. Anderson and G. Stansfield, "The Implication of Elections for Federalism in Iraq. Toward a Five-Region Model", *Publius*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2005, p. 376.

[5] R. Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State: Separatism and Nationalism in Southern Iraq*, Münster, Germany, LIT Verlag, 2005.

The end of the Baathist regime, the difficulties encountered by the "new Iraq," and the growing influence exerted by Shia religious-political circles in the *atabat* (Iraq's Shia shrine cities) contributed to a renewal of Basra's demands for autonomy[6]. In early 2004, Basra governor Wael Abd al-Latif's proposal to grant Iraq's southernmost governorate a status akin to the one enjoyed by Dubai inside the United Arab Emirates[7] demonstrated the resilience of Basra's particularism. With the adoption of the new constitution, the autonomist movement shifted its position, demanding the conferral of regional status to the Basra governorate (*iqlim al-basra*). A less known variant envisioned the unification of the governorates of Basra, Maysan, and Dhi-Qar into a single region (*iqlim al-janub*). Differently from the *iqlim al-basra* initiative, it lacked transversal political support and was sidelined in a matter of months[8]. While enjoying significant backing, especially among Basra elites and politicians of different stripes, the regionalist movement failed to attract widespread popular support and also faced the overt hostility of key local actors, Muqtada al-Sadr supporters *in primis*.

Local opposition was not the only challenge the autonomist schemes centered around Basra had to face. The project had to cope with fierce opposition from Baghdad's nationalist circles. After a series of failures[9], the August 2011 petition demanding the organization of a referendum aimed at assessing the citizens' support for the *iqlim al-basra* project secured the backing of over one-tenth of the members of the provincial council, meeting the requirements set by article 119 of the constitution. But Basra, with its crucial geopolitical position and its huge oil reserves, was too important to be granted autonomy, especially at

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[6] K.F. Osman, *Sectarianism in Iraq: The Making of State and Nation since 1920*, London, Routledge, 2015, pp. 247-248.

[7] R. Visser, "Basra: Reluctant Seat of 'Shiastan'", *Middle East Research and Information Project*, no. 242, 2007, p. 1.

[8] International Crisis Group, "Where is Iraq heading? Lessons from Basra", *Middle East Report,* no. 67, 2007, pp. 4-7.

[9] S. al-Wazzan, "Basra's Bid for Autonomy Fails", *Niqash*, 29 January 2009.

a time when the "Arab Spring" was destabilizing the whole region, dissatisfaction with Iraq's federal government was soaring (especially in Arab Sunni-majority areas), and Baghdad-Erbil relations hit a new low. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki openly denounced the initiative as a threat to the country's unity and succeeded in effectively halting the process[10]. The stalemate lasted until the appointment of his successor, Haider al-Abadi, who became prime minister in summer 2014, after the fall of Mosul to IS plummeted Iraq into its worst crisis since the end of the civil war. While adamant in preserving the unity of Iraq, the new prime minister explicitly voiced his opposition to hyper-centralization policies, stating during a meeting held in 2015 at the Center for Strategic and International Studies: "If we don't decentralize, the country will disintegrate [...] To me, there are no limitations to decentralization"[11].

In this context, Basra's bid for autonomy gathered momentum: a new petition launched in 2015 secured enough signatures to push Iraq's Independent Electoral Commission to organize a governorate-wide vote[12]. Should Basra regionalists succeed in reaching the threshold required by article 119 of the constitution (10 percent of the governorate's registered voters), the doors to a referendum about the creation of *iqlim al-basra* would be opened. In this context, the protests that swept Basra during the summer of 2018 represent a factor that could tilt the balance in favor of the autonomist camp, bringing it closer to a result that could dramatically impact Iraq's internal dynamics and equilibriums.

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[10] B. Isakhan and P.E. Mulherin (2018), pp. 271-276.

[11] M. Schehl, "Iraqi Official: Decentralization Key to Nation's Survival", *Military Times*, 16 April 2015.

[12] B. Isakhan and P.E. Mulherin (2018), pp. 280-281.

Regionalism as a Reaction:
How Do Arab Sunni Majority Areas Fit In?

Basra was not alone in its quest for regional autonomy. Especially from 2011 onward, a series of movements in areas inhabited by sizable Arab Sunni communities began to campaign for the creation of one or more autonomous regions. In contrast to the southern regional schemes described above, such calls did not stem from overtly sectarian considerations or alleged socio-political, economic, or cultural particularism. They were largely the result of a protracted struggle that reached its apex during al-Maliki's second tenure when growing portions of the Arab-Sunni community revolted against a federal government perceived as biased, if not inherently hostile. The marginalization of the Iraqiyya party (which despite winning the 2010 elections was stripped of the authority to form a government) and of the *sahwa* councils (whose contribution to the fight against al-Qaeda in Iraq and its epigones proved fundamental to bringing the group to its knees[13]), the waves of arrests targeting thousands of citizens protesting against the policies adopted by the cabinet, and the restrictive measures imposed on key Arab Sunni politicians[14] pushed what were once perceived as strongholds of Iraqi nationalism traditionally hostile to any form of decentralization to consider regionalism as one of their few remaining options[15]. Between 2011 and 2013, albeit with different inten-

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[13] M. Benraad, "Iraq's Tribal 'Sahwa': its Rise and Fall", *Middle East Policy*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2011.

[14] Amongst them, Iraq's vice president Tariq al-Hashimi was one of the first to be targeted. Following the arrest of his bodyguards and the airing of their confessions on TV in December 2011, he fled the country and was sentenced to death in absentia for terrorism. A year later, it was the turn of Iraq's Minister of Finance Rafi al-Issawi. He resigned after his bodyguards were arrested in what was widely perceived as a reiteration of the al-Hashimi's affair. In 2013, the arrest of al-Anbar's Minister of Parliament Ahmad al-Alwani provoked an outburst of public anger that resulted in a prolonged destabilization.

[15] P. Marr and I. al-Marashi, *The Modern History of Iraq*, Westview Press, 2017, pp. 271-286; T. Dodge and B. Wasser, "The Crisis of the Iraqi State", in T. Dodge

sity and features, al-Anbar, Nineveh, Salahaddin and Diyala all saw the emergence of movements demanding the formation of autonomous regions. The process received particular traction in Salahaddin, home governorate of Saddam Hussein, where an initial declaration of autonomy issued by the provincial council at the end of 2011 was followed by two petitions expressly aimed at triggering the procedure set forth by article 119 of the constitution[16].

The wave of protests that paralyzed most of Iraq's Arab-Sunni heartland after 2011 and the ascendance of the self-proclaimed Islamic State resulted in the marginalization of these regional schemes. Yet they did not seal the fate of the decentralization movement active in the area. The ominous defeat suffered by the Iraqi security forces in Mosul, the enormous difficulties Baghdad faced during the three-year military campaign that followed, and the relative strength the KRI enjoyed *vis-à-vis* the federal government up to 2017 (when the *peshmerga* forces stationed there since 2014 were obliged to abandon Kirkuk and most of the disputed areas[17]) contributed to the emergence of new autonomist initiatives. Among them, one of the most significant was the macro-regional scheme upheld by (among others) Athil al-Nujaifi. While condemning the brutality of IS' occupation, the former governor of Mosul did not refrain from

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and E. Hokayem (eds.), *Middle Eastern Security, the U.S. Pivot and the Rise of ISIS*, Adelphi Series, vol. 447-448, 2014; R. Mansour, "The Sunni Predicament in Iraq", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 3 March 2016.

[16] S. Nasrawi, "Break-up of Iraq?", *al-Ahram Weekly*, no. 1072, 17-23 November 2011.

[17] The term refers to a series of territories claimed both by the Federal Government and by the Kurdistan Regional Government. The Iraqi constitution set a series of steps aimed at solving the status of these areas which are mainly located in the governorates of Niniveh, Salahaddin, Diyala, Tamim, and Wasit. After more than nine years, these measures have not been implemented yet. See P. Bartu, "Wrestling with the Integrity of a Nation: The Disputed Internal Boundaries in Iraq," *International Affairs*, vol. 86, no. 6, 2010; S. Kane, "Iraq's Disputed Territories. A View of the Political Horizon and Implications for U.S. Policy", United States Institute of Peace, no. 69, 4 April 2011.

underlining how the group succeeded in tapping the socio-political and economic potential of the Arab Sunni heartland. In his own words: "What [IS] has managed to do is decentralize governance […] No longer is Mosul's future determined by politicians in Baghdad. We agree with some of the things they [IS] have done and don't agree with others […] But we need to follow the changes, not to go back to what we had before"[18].

In all likelihood, al-Nujaifi's considerations did not reflect the positions of the diverse social groups inhabiting the areas stretching from al-Anbar and Nineveh (to the west) to Diyala (to the east). Yet they were the manifestation of a growing resentment toward a federal system that proved unable to fulfill Arab Sunni aspirations. In this regard, far from reproducing the widespread local opposition that followed previous sectarian plans, this new version of the "Sunnistan" project was not met by public anger but was instead merely perceived as one of the options on the table. This response would have been simply unimaginable a few years ago and is further proof of the evolution of a socio-political system much more fluid than generally acknowledged.

Conclusion

The preamble of the Iraqi constitution defines Iraq as a "republican, federal, democratic, pluralistic system."[19] Yet despite being formally recognized as one of the pillars of the new Iraq, the federal provisions enshrined in the national charter have only been partially implemented. Especially during the two Nuri al-Maliki Administrations, center-periphery relations have been particularly tense, not only along the Baghdad-Erbil axis. The centralizing policies adopted from 2011 onward have dramatically impacted the stability of the fragile Iraqi

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[18] J. Ensor, "We can learn things from Isil's rule, says exiled Mosul governor fighting to take back his city", *The Telegraph*, 5 June 2016.

[19] Preamble, The Constitution of the Republic of Iraq, 2005.

polity, contributing to the further polarization of the country's socio-political fabric. While 2017 saw the reaffirmation of Baghdad's prominence in the Iraqi system, the challenges ahead remain extremely significant. In this regard, the federal schemes envisioning the creation of new regions cannot continue to be considered an existential threat to Iraqi unity, but rather as part of a broader national dialogue that was abruptly interrupted with the adoption of the 2005 constitution and that needs to be revived. Fifteen years after the fall of one of the worst regimes in history, a debate on the very foundations of the Iraqi polity is still very much alive as the country fights for a better future.

PART III

**POLITICAL OPPOSITION
IN THE ARAB WORLD**

6. Islamist-Inspired Groups After the Arab Spring

Arturo Varvelli, Silvia Carenzi

The issue of democratic deficit and authoritarian rule in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been at the center of scholarly and non-scholarly debate for a long time. Discussions have frequently concentrated on its roots, focusing on a range of factors – such as the lack of legitimacy of various governments in the region, critical reliance on oil resources, or the role of external players in legitimizing local authorities – and trying to fathom how they reduce the opposition's actual political space[1].

As a matter of fact, authoritarian politics in the region have become increasingly hybridized over the last decade, to such a degree that observers have started to speak of "electoral

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[1] For a more thorough study on the topic, see L. Diamond, "Why are there no Arab democracies?", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2010, pp. 93-104. Diamond states that the issue of the lack of democracy in the Arab world has been often handled in a simplistic fashion, paving the way for misinterpretations. For instance, illiberal rule in those countries, Diamond argues, is not inherently related to religion, culture, or economic development *per se*; rather, other aspects ought to be factored in. One of them has to do with the mechanisms seen in rentier states (i.e., "the ways in which oil distorts the state, the market, the class structure, and the entire incentive structure," p. 98), internal political structures, and international dynamics (e.g., external forces providing local governments with financial aid, cooperating in the field of security and legitimizing them). See also S. M. Bölme, "The Roots of Authoritarianism in the Middle East", in J. Karakoç (ed.), *Authoritarianism in the Middle East*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 7-37.

authoritarianism"[2]. The political landscape, once dominated by single parties, has assimilated other political forces contesting elections that are, however, in no way free or fair. Victories by loyalists – individuals and groups that are loyal to those in power, be they the president or bureaucratic-military cliques – are never questioned. Conversely, opposition forces may hope to obtain representation in parliament in order to gain access to economic, media, and organizational assets. Moreover, local regimes resort to a mix of repression and cooptation. While it sounds counterintuitive, illiberal regimes are in fact less exposed to bottom-up revolts insofar as they give space to opposition parties in parliament, limitedly resort to election rigging, and set up broad government coalitions. Being partially involved in this system of rewards offered by the regime, opposition parties thereby have an interest in the survival of those authoritarian systems[3].

The so-called "Arab Spring" – a phrase employed in recent years to describe the revolts which shook the MENA region beginning in 2011 – is a landmark event in this context[4]. An upheaval for the regional system – despite states and borders remaining intact[5] and the return of authoritarian rule following the wave of revolts – it seemingly marked the end of the "Arab exception"[6]. The Arab uprisings were a diverse phenomenon,

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[2] See, among others, S.M. Bölme (2015); and R. Tlemçani, "Electoral authoritarianism", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 29 May 2007,

[3] For instance, see H. Albrecht, "How can opposition support authoritarianism? Lessons from Egypt," *Democratization*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2005, pp. 378-397.

[4] For an overview of the Arab uprisings, their root causes, and their implications, see among others: M. Lynch (ed.), *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2014; M. Campanini, *Le rivolte arabe e l'Islam. La transizione incompiuta*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2013; M. Mercuri and S. Torelli, "La primavera araba. Origini ed effetti delle rivolte che stanno cambiando il Medio Oriente," Milan, Vita e Pensiero, 2012.

[5] L. Fawcett, "States and sovereignty in the Middle East: myths and realities," *International Affairs*, vol. 93, no. 4, 2017, p. 807.

[6] M. Campanini, "Le rivolte arabe: verso un nuovo modello politico?", in M. Campanini (2013), p. 11. The expression "Arab exception" (or "Arab

with distinct manifestations and traits in each country of the region. Demands were mainly non-religious ones, varying from country to country, but often relating to corruption, injustice, economic imbalances, authoritarian rule, lack of representation, and so on.

Despite the protestors' demands being non-religious in nature, Islamist-inspired groups attempted to play a role in politics with diverging outcomes. For this very reason, analyzing the post-Arab Spring environment and the persistence of authoritarian rule requires analyzing the role of Islamist-inspired forces. This is a compelling question, especially if one considers the "twin shocks" experienced by Islamist-inspired groups over the years after the revolts – the deposition of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, and the ascent of the self-styled Islamic State (IS)[7]. Long-standing issues such as the relationship and compatibility between Islamist-inspired organizations and democracy came to the fore once again. Islamist-inspired groups found themselves tested as never before: Having attained the power they had long yearned for, what were they supposed to do with it? Finally, an interesting question concerns not only the role played by Islamist-inspired forces in the changing region, but also how these very Islamist forces were affected by such developments.

Words Matter: A Note About Terminology

Defining terms designating Islamist-inspired groups – including "political Islam" or "jihadism" – does not come without challenges. No unanimous consensus exists in the matter of

exceptionalism") generally refers to the lack of democracy in the MENA region. At times, this concept has been coupled by the view that local civil society was supposedly "passive" *vis-à-vis* the regime. The 2011-2012 revolts were crucial, as they challenged the very notion of a supine civil society.

[7] S. Hamid and W. McCants, "Introduction," in S. Hamid and W. McCants (eds.), *Rethinking Political Islam*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 1.

definitions. Literature on the subject often fluctuates between the apposition of supposedly universal labels (which originally described phenomena originating in a Western context) and the need to acknowledge the peculiarities of the MENA region (while trying to avoid the trap of exceptionalism). Other hurdles pose a further challenge – primarily, the difficulty of labeling a fluid, evolving, diverse phenomena, as well as scholarly debates on the doctrinal roots of Islamist-oriented violent and non-violent forces alike.[8] In this brief paper we will not delve into any of those theoretical debates, nor will we dwell on specific problems associated with terms such as "Islamism" or "jihadism." Rather – while acknowledging linguistic, conceptual, and practical limits associated with these expressions – we will provide a simplified, operational definition of them, as they will be frequently handled across the text.

The phrase "political Islam" and "Islamism" shall be used interchangeably, to indicate "Islam used to a political end"[9]

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[8] For instance, a number of authors regard jihadism as a part of a wider spectrum, that of Salafism (e.g., Quintan Wiktorowicz); others see it as a crossbreed between Salafism and the revolutionary ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood, and thus speak of Salafi-jihadism; finally, other scholars disagree with this characterization and emphasize the role of former ideologues from the Muslim Brotherhood (as opposed to the role of Salafi theoreticians). Thomas Hegghammer also proposed a distinct taxonomy entirely based on political preferences and political behaviors of Islamist-inspired forces. Cf. Q. Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi movement", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2006, pp. 207-239; G. Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, London, I.B. Tauris & Co., 2006; H. Hassan, "The Sectarianism of the Islamic State: Ideological Roots and Political Context", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 13 June 2016; T. Hegghammer (2009). See also this thread on Twitter: Hassan Hassan [@hxhassan], "Jihadism = MB Islamism + Salafi teachings. Without understanding this fusion & dealing with the two aspects, jihadism persists. That simple", Twitter post, 13 February 2017; in particular, see these Tweets within the thread: T. Hamming [@ToreRHamming], "For me Salafi-Jihadism is a bad nexus to understand groups like al-Qaida and the Islamic State @hxhassan. They're all jihadis but not Salafi", Twitter post, 13 February 2017; @AbdullahKhaledS, "@ToreRHamming @hxhassan IMO the bulk of S-J ideas have their roots in the writings of MB theorists and ideologues rather than Salafis", Twitter post, 13 February 2017.

[9] A. Knudsen, "Political Islam in the Middle East," *Chr. Michelsen Institute*

– to put it briefly. More extensively, as stated in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Politics*, the word "Islamism":

> […] at the very least represents a form of social and political activism, grounded in an idea that public and political life should be guided by a set of Islamic principles. In other words, Islamists are those who believe that Islam has an important role to play in organizing a Muslim majority society and who seek to implement this belief. As such, Islamist activism is a public manifestation of *religiously informed political will*, often expressed as resistance to various types of competing ideas, policies, and even lifestyles[10].

While "Islamism" encompasses a wide set of actors, in this analysis we will mainly use this expression to refer to *mainstream* Islamists, i.e. "those that operate within the confines of institutional politics and are willing to work within existing state

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Development Studies and Human Rights, Bergen, 2003, p. 2. However, please note that Knudsen sees the term "political Islam" as problematic, preferring to use "Islamism".

[10] E. Poljarevic, "Islamism", *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Politics*, 2015; Denoeux defines Islamism as "a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups and organizations that pursue political objectives" in G. Denoeux, "The Forgotten Swamp: Navigating Political Islam," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2002, p. 61. For other proposed definitions, debates on the use of these terms, and related criticism, see also F. Volpi, *Political Islam Observed: Disciplinary Perspectives*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2010; M. Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2008; R. Koch, "Islam and Politics in Tunisia", *Islam and Politics in a Changing Middle East,* April 2014; S. Zemni, "9/11: The End of Islamism? Islamism: A Concept in Need of a Definition or the Hermeneutical Fight Over an Object of Study", *Middle East & North Africa Research Group (MENARG),* MENARG Working Paper no. 2, 2007; C. Hirschkind, "What is Political Islam?", *Middle East Report,* vol. 27, no. 4, 1997, pp. 12-14; M. Mozaffari, "What is Islamism? History and Definition of a Concept," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, vol. 8, no. 1, March 2007, pp. 17-33; P. Maggiolini, "Il fondamentalismo islamico: mille volti che guardano un'unica 'verità'," in A. Plebani and M. Diez (eds.), *La galassia fondamentalista tra jihad armato e partecipazione politica*, Venice, Marsilio Editore, 2015, pp. 26-39.

structures, even ostensibly secular ones"[11]. Within the realm of mainstream Islamism, Muslim Brotherhood-linked or -inspired groups are arguably the most prominent forces.

In contrast, here "jihadism" is understood as a strand of (Sunni) Islamism which distinguishes itself from (and is defined in opposition to) Brotherhood-inspired mainstream Islamism, and advocates "a rigid theology and an unswerving commitment to armed struggle, or jihad, against the state and all they deem to be unbelievers"[12]. Therefore, jihadism may be ultimately seen as a violent form of Islamism[13].

Finally, we will provide an operational definition of the expression "Salafism" – another hard-to-describe concept, especially since observers treat it as a descriptive term, while Islamists regard it as a normative one[14]. The *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* defines it as a "branch of Sunni Islam whose modern-day adherents claim to emulate 'the pious predecessors' *(al-salaf al-salih*; often equated with the first three generations of Muslims) as closely and in as many spheres of life as possible," at the same time "rejecting all other sources of influence"[15].

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[11] See footnote 1 in S. Hamid and W. McCants (2017), p. 309.

[12] C. Bunzel, "Jihadism on Its Own Terms," *Hoover Institution*, 17 May 2017, p. 6. For an in-depth analysis of this term and its potential shortcomings, see M. Sedgwick, "Jihadism, Narrow and Wide: The Dangers of Loose Use of an Important Term", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2015, pp. 34-41. See also D. Cook, "Islamism and Jihadism: The Transformation of Classical Notions of Jihad into an Ideology of Terrorism", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2009; S. Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea,* London, Oxford University Press, 2016.

[13] As noted by C. Bunzel (2017), p. 5: "Islamism is a catchall term for a variety of modern Islamic political movements. It cannot be equated with jihadism. All jihadis are Islamists – call them jihadi Islamists – but very few Islamists are jihadis."

[14] T. Hegghammer (2009), p. 248.

[15] J. Wagemakers, "Salafism", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 5 August 2016, p. 1, http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-255.

Islamist Groups and the Muslim Brotherhood: Where Are They Heading?

As noted previously, Islamist players – and more specifically, Muslim Brotherhood-inspired groups – played a prominent role in the Arab Spring. In some countries, Muslim Brotherhood-inspired parties or candidates won presidential and/or parliamentarian elections. There is no single Islamism or Muslim Brotherhood; rather, these can be seen as a forming a manifold galaxy, dotted with internal differences ideologically and operationally.

These cleavages manifest themselves in distinct ways. On the one hand, there are cross-national discrepancies – divergences between Muslim Brotherhood-linked groups operating in different countries. On the other hand, divisions exist within each country-based group as well. All in all, recent developments suggest that context does matter[16]. Islamist actors in the MENA region eventually experienced a diverse set of fates – not a single path – depending on a range of factors. This section will sketch a few illustrative examples, first by identifying a few noteworthy subnational differences, and second by looking at cross-national divergences.

The Muslim Brotherhood

The Arab revolts had an impact on the Muslim Brotherhood's inner dynamics by deepening already existing internal fissures – for instance the division (*inqisam*) between traditionalists and reformists in Egypt. This *inqisam* between an old guard and new, emergent activists occasionally (though not always) mirrored a generational gap – since the two generations were shaped by different junctures. Notably, the "new generation"

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[16] See O. Roy, "Political Islam After the Arab Spring: Between Jihad and Democracy", *Foreign Affairs,* vol. 96, no. 6, 2017. In his review of the book edited by S. Hamid and W. McCants, Roy cites the debate between "essentialists" and "contextualists" in evaluating Islamist groups.

was profoundly molded by the Arab Spring and post-Arab Spring happenings, including the Rabaa massacre[17]. While the old guard tended to retain a gradualist approach, new activists sported more revolutionary leanings[18].

To understand such a shift, one should scrutinize key aspects such as hierarchy and deference to leadership. As key members of the Egyptian Brotherhood were sidelined (arrested, forced into hiding, or exiled), younger cadres had to assume a major burden, leading to improvisation – in utter contrast with the Brotherhood's hierarchical modus operandi[19]. Some eschewed gradualism and ended up in the orbit of more radical groups. Finally, the loss of control endured by the Brotherhood's traditional leadership led some revolutionary members to resort to situational violence[20]. Another interesting case is that of Syria. Here, the split between the older and younger generations dates back to the 1980s, when the old guard created an informal bureaucracy in exile and, for the sake of organizational survival, concentrated power in the hands of a few cadres. Those tensions compounded over the following years and, finally, with the outbreak of the conflict in Syria, prompted many younger and reform-minded activists to strive to exert a greater influence. On the one hand, some of them eventually decided to defect from the Brotherhood, forming the National Action Group for Syria. On the other hand, a Syrian Brotherhood youth office was established in 2012, to address the demands of younger Brotherhood members who aimed at a more prominent role within the organization[21].

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[17] The Rabaa massacre occurred in August 2013, when Egyptian security forces and the army stormed a sit-in of anti-coup protesters, killing over 800 people.
[18] S. Hamid, W. McCants, and R. Dar, "Islamism after the Arab Spring: Between the Islamic State and the nation-state", The Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World, *U.S.-Islamic World Forum Papers*, 2015, p. 3.
[19] Ibid., p. 5
[20] M. Awad and M. Hashem, "Egypt's Escalating Islamist Insurgency", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2015.
[21] R. Lefèvre, "Syria", in S. Hamid and W. McCants (2017), pp. 73-75; R. Lefèvre, "The Muslim Brotherhood prepares for a comeback in Syria," Carnegie

Recent years' events have not only deepened the divide between old-school leaders and emerging activists but have also resulted in an evolution of the relationship between party (*hizb*) and religious movement (*haraka*) within the Brotherhood. In other terms, the issue is whether (and to what extent) Muslim Brotherhood-linked groups were supposed to draw a line between politics *sensu stricto* (i.e. party activism) and socio-religious activism. In many cases, they gave an affirmative answer to this question[22]. In Egypt, for example, the distinction between *hizb* and *haraka* became increasingly blurred in the eyes of citizens, reaching a peak in 2013, in the run-up to parliamentary elections (originally scheduled for that year). However, over the subsequent period, several Brotherhood members perceived the need to reconsider their views and possibly reaffirm the distinction between *hizb* and *haraka*[23]. In Tunisia, the relationship between the Brotherhood as a movement and the Brotherhood as a party (Ennahda) embarked upon a more clear-cut path. In the May 2016 Congress, Ennahda formalized the distinction between the party functions and the movement's activities[24].

Subnational rifts within Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups may also follow geographical lines. Such is the case in Syria where a diversion exists between one Brotherhood faction

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Endowment for International Peace, 2013. It should be noted that in a first moment, when the 2011 Syrian uprisings broke out, the Brotherhood tended to remain on the sidelines. However, it subsequently strove to play a greater role, especially by trying to influence rebel groups in Syria – though its clout has somehow waned, and it had (and still has) to tackle a number of challenges (including the rise of jihadist groups, internal fragmentation, and so on). See Y.U. Blanga, "The Role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Syrian Civil War", *Middle East Policy*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2017, pp. 48-69.

[22] S. Brooke, "The Muslim Brotherhood Between Party and Movement", in M. Lynch (ed.), *Islam in a Changing Middle East: Local Politics and Islamist Movements*, Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS), POMEPS Studies 26, 27 April 2017.

[23] Ibid.; S. Brooke, "Egypt," in S. Hamid and W. McCants (2017), pp. 28-29.

[24] Ibid., p. 30.

based in Hama and one in Aleppo[25]. In the case of Jordan, sub-national divisions may be more communal than ideological or geographical – having to do with the Brotherhood's greater reliance on the Palestinian-Jordanian constituency in recent years (*vis-à-vis* Transjordanian electors)[26].

A few cases are worth mentioning regarding the second dimension – the variance of Brotherhood-linked groups across countries. The cross-national groups are particularly useful when charting the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and state institutions. On the whole, Islamist forces in the MENA region tended to accommodate and thus (implicitly or explicitly) acknowledge the local state system[27]. Still, they followed diverse trajectories.

Egypt

The evolution of Egypt's political scene over recent years offers a compelling example in that regard. In June 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood attained power with Mohamed Morsi, the first democratically elected president in the country after decades of autocratic rule. According to analysts, the Egyptian Brotherhood – once in power – did not manage to successfully lead a democratic transition, and its political, ideological, and organizational shortcomings prevented it from retaining the reins of government[28].

Following Morsi's ouster in 2013, the new government outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood and tried to disrupt its network of social services, such as hospitals and schools. In its effort to dismantle Brotherhood networks, the regime has found itself in an awkward dilemma. On the one hand, it is willing to prevent the rise of new, state-independent loci of activism, as these

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[25] R. Lefèvre (2013).

[26] D. Siddharth Patel, "Jordan", in S. Hamid and McCants (2017), p. 156.

[27] S. Brooke (2017), p. 25.

[28] For a thorough examination of the Egyptian Brotherhood's shortcomings, see A. El Sherif, "The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Failures", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (2014).

might convert their social commitment into political influence, thus undermining the government. On the other hand, crushing these networks of social provisioning may disrupt socio-political stability and consequently threaten the political establishment. The real challenge for those in power is to strike a balance[29].

Tunisia

The political path taken by the Tunisian party Ennahda differs from that of the Egyptian Brotherhood. In fact, among the countries shaken by the 2011 wave of revolts, Tunisia is seen as the only one to have experienced a successful transition toward democracy (though a fragile one)[30]. As a response to internal as well as external stimuli – the rise of jihadism and a jihadist proto-state (IS) in the region, the ousting of Morsi from power in Egypt, and the risk of a political crisis at home – Ennahda set to recast its own vision of Islamism. The party embraced a cautious and flexible approach designed for compromise and centered on the need to survive. Ultimately, these changes led to the normalization of Ennahda. Finally, at the May 2016 party congress, Ennahda co-founder Rashid al-Ghannushi repudiated the "Islamist" label, defining Ennahda as a "Muslim democratic" party[31].

Ennahda cadres distanced themselves from the Egyptian Brotherhood, which – in their view – was guilty of monopolizing the political process[32]. The discrepancy between the Egyptian and the Tunisian Brotherhood was also highlighted in a study by Frédéric Volpi and Ewan Stein comparing how different Islamist groups fared in the post-Arab spring landscape. They argued that the groups' outcomes could be ascribed to "the choices made during and in the aftermath of the uprisings"

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[29] S. Brooke (2017), pp. 19-20.

[30] M. Marks, "Tunisia", in S. Hamid and W. McCants (2017), p. 32.

[31] Ibid., p. 44.

[32] Ibid., pp. 35-38.

plus "longer term path dependencies"[33]. In their view, Tunisia's Ennahda may have played a stabilizing role, contributing to the strengthening of democracy after the revolution. In contrast, such words cannot be said of the Egyptian Brotherhood, since their actions, along with those of the military and of former regime figures, "prevented the routinization of multiparty and electoral politics"[34].

Other Islamist parties in the region modeled their policies after Ennahda's caution – something which emphasizes their underlying need to survive. This is epitomized by events in Morocco. In 2011, Abdelilah Benkirane was the first democratically elected Islamist prime minister in the Arab world. His party, the Justice and Development Party (PJD), was legalized in the late 1990s and allowed to operate as long as it did not threaten the kingdom's religious legitimacy. PJD managed to survive and resist repression (within given boundaries). Its endurance might stem from three elements: first, the Moroccan political setting; second, the control exerted by Moroccan Islamist groups' *hizb* on their respective *haraka*; and third, the competition between PJD and another Islamist group, *Al-adl wa al-Ihsan*[35].

Therefore, as already noted, the Islamist galaxy has been marked by dynamics of differentiation in the post-Arab Spring context, inasmuch as single groups adapted to specific, local environments have experienced diverse political outcomes. While the Egyptian Brotherhood has been subjected to repression after the deposition of Morsi, with Sisi's government designing

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[33] F. Volpi and E. Stein, "Islamism and the state after the Arab uprisings: Between people power and state power," in *Democratization*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2015, p. 285.

[34] Ibid., p. 286. Ennahda's "pragmatism" is displayed in other matters as well. In 2013, as the Tunisian transition process teetered on the brink of collapse, many Ennahda leaders stepped down from government. Additionally, Ennahda leader Rashid al-Ghannushi eventually opposed a law of lustration which would have targeted former members of the Ben Ali regime. Cf. M. Marks (2017).

[35] A.M. Spiegel, "Morocco," in S. Hamid and W. McCants (2017), p. 55. Al-Adl wa al-Ihsan is another Islamist group operating in Morocco that, unlike the PJD, is not legal (but tolerated by authorities).

it as a "terrorist organization," the Tunisian Ennahda party has experienced a process of normalization and institutionalization. Indeed, it appears that ideology alone cannot explain the path of Islamist groups.

Salafism

The politicization of Salafi forces in the MENA region – a process which was already underway in the previous decades – intensified in the post-Arab Spring setting[36]. Indeed, some of them abandoned their quietist stance to enter the political stage and, in a number of cases, establishing political parties and contesting elections. This surge in the politicization of Salafism may be contingent upon various factors, at both the national and the international level, including the history and traditions of those groups (e.g. the well-entrenched networks that Egyptian Salafists established over decades), as well as opportunities and constraints in their domestic environment (e.g. the conducive setting provided by the disenfranchised youth). In particular, the phenomenon might, too, have been stimulated by dynamics of competition with other players – especially religious competitors, such as Brotherhood-linked groups[37].

Even though Salafists tend to be ideologically distant from local governments – sharing more stringent views, at times in a far greater measure than Brotherhood-linked groups – in some cases (e.g. Egypt) they have been tolerated precisely because they do not challenge the status quo. Thus, the discriminating factor is not an ideological one, but rather their compliance with the regime's (or the dominating party's) rules – which contributes to legitimizing it.

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[36] This section will only briefly mention a couple of cases. For a thorough examination on the issue of Salafi groups after the Arab revolts, see F. Cavatorta and F. Merone (eds.), *Salafism After the Arab Awakening: Contending with People's Power*, London, Hurst Publishers, 2017.

[37] Ibid., pp. 2-3.

The most prominent example in this respect is perhaps provided by Hizb al-Nour, an Egyptian Salafi party tolerated and allowed to operate by the government. Founded in 2011 in the wake of Hosni Mubarak's fall by members of an Alexandria-based Salafi movement called *al-Dawa al-Salafiyya* ("The Salafi Call", which emerged in the late 1970s), the group envisioned taking part in the transition process and influencing its shape. In doing so, it embraced a twofold approach: to be orthodox in social and religious matters while pragmatic in political affairs[38].

In the second round of the 2012 presidential elections, it grudgingly backed the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Morsi, who ended up winning. Yet, from 2013 onward, al-Nour started to oppose Morsi and the Brotherhood due to dynamics of competition[39], and because their mutual interests started to dissolve, ultimately giving its blessing to his deposition in July 2013. Although the party verbally condemned brutality exerted by police during the August 2013 Rabaa crackdown, this did not prompt it to withdraw its support for the new government. Still, these moves did not appear to pay off significantly, as few gains were made by the party[40]. In the March 2018 election, Sisi was buttressed by al-Nour, once again[41].

Another interesting case is that of Salafism in Tunisia. Interestingly, in 2012, Ennahda legalized the Reform Front Party (*Jabhat al-Islah*), a small Salafi party which did not achieve the success vaunted by Egypt's al-Nour in its heyday[42]. In any case, the relationship between Ennahda and Salafi forces broadly

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[38] S. Lacroix, "Egypt's Pragmatic Salafis: The Politics of Hizb al-Nour", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1 November 2016.

[39] K. al-Anani, "Unpacking the Sacred Canopy: Egypt's Salafis between Religion and Politics", in F. Cavatorta and F. Merone (eds.) (2017).

[40] Cf. S. Lacroix (2016).

[41] N. Awadalla, "In survival mode, Egypt's last permitted Islamists back Sisi", *Reuters*, 28 March 2018.

[42] For an analysis on the Reform Front Party, see A. Y. Zelin, "Who is Jabhat al-Islah?", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 18 July 2012, http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/11/01/egypt-s-pragmatic-salafis-politics-of-hizb-al-nour-pub-64902.

speaking cannot be taken at a face value, as their alignment was also dictated by mutual interests: among others, the former intended to expand its constituency, while the latter were seeking strong political allies. Moreover, Ennahda possibly believed that some of the Salafi views might be toned down through dialog and political inclusion. However, Ennahda's refusal to insert sharia in the draft constitution in March 2012 disgruntled Salafists and ultimately called into question their "marriage of convenience"[43].

Indeed, as briefly shown, Salafism is not a static phenomenon and – just like other Islamist-inspired forces – it has been affected by the Arab revolts and subsequent happenings. The case of Egypt has proved – once again – that mechanisms of alignment and/or opposition between Salafi players and ruling parties cannot be solely seen through the prism of religion, since other factors (e.g. common interests and rivalry) come into play. As argued in the next section, however, the post-2010 events not only had an impact on Muslim Brotherhood-inspired and Salafi forces, but also on actors pertaining to the subversive realm: jihadist organizations.

Jihadist Players

As jihadism has expanded in the Arab world in recent years, attention has been focused not only on institutionalized Islamist and Salafi groups, but also on insurgent organizations entering the jihadist panoply[44]. This is demonstrated first and foremost by the rise of a new player in the jihadist realm, IS, which set up a jihadist proto-state and acquired massive financial, human,

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[43] See, among others, G. Fahmi, "The Future of Political Salafism in Egypt and Tunisia", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 16 November 2015; S. Zouaghi and F. Cavatorta, "A Doomed Relationship: Ennahdha and Salafism", Issue Brief, Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, 27 April 2018.

[44] B. Lia, "Jihadism in the Arab World after 2011: Explaining Its Expansion", *Middle East Policy*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2016, pp. 74-91.

and ideological capital. At its peak, IS controlled over 40,000 square miles across Syria and Iraq[45]. It is estimated that over 40,000 foreign fighters traveled to Syria and Iraq to join the group[46]. Groups swearing loyalty to IS – some of them also holding territories for a certain period – sprouted in areas outside the Levant (including Libya, Egypt, and Afghanistan), assuming the name of *wilayat* (provinces). However, the jihadist universe is also populated by other players beyond IS's scope – for example, groups in Syria such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, once linked to al-Qaeda.

Factors leading to the rise of extremist groups are multifarious, and pertain to the macro-, meso-, and micro-level alike. Undoubtedly, developments in the past shaped the trajectory of jihadism on both ideological and operational planes. These historical factors include the thought-leadership of theoreticians such as Sayyid Qutb, the 1979 siege of Mecca, and more recently, the US intervention in Iraq and the subsequent proliferation of insurgent groups. However, in a narrower focus, it is also true that the post-Arab Spring setting proved to be a conducive environment, given the deterioration of already existing trends and the emergence of new catalysts, including the transnational nature of jihadist insurgencies and their related networks; the socio-economic grievances of local people; the weak legitimacy of several Arab countries (and the attempt by non-state actors to fill this void); and the partial collapse of states, which led to a breakdown of regional order[47].

Several of these governments are neither capable of "absorbing" social protests nor providing protesters with freedom of expression and political representation. Being impervious to implementing changes, their stability is merely ostensible. The

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[45] D. Zucchino, "Islamic State Is 'On the Run,' U.S. Commander Says", *The New York Times*, 25 October 2017.

[46] R. Barrett, "Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees", The Soufan Group, October 2017, p. 7.

[47] B. Lia (2016); P. Salem, The Rise of Violent Transnational Movements in the Middle East, MEI Policy Paper 2018-1, Middle East Institute, 2018.

political space of opposition forces is reduced, if not complete-
ly non-existent. This asphyxiation pushed genuine social and
political dissent underground, where it was absorbed by sedi-
tious, radical, and jihadist groups[48]. Moreover, the perception
in various countries that institutionalized Islamism has not de-
livered on its promises and/or failed (e.g. in Egypt), coupled
with frustration with the gradual, prudent approach sponsored
by a number of Brotherhood-linked and Salafi groups has em-
bittered more revolutionary strands and set some on a course
toward violent extremism.

This new wave of jihadist-related mobilization has paral-
leled internal shifts within the jihadist galaxy, triggering sev-
eral noteworthy intra-group and inter-group dynamics. The
split between IS (at the time ISIS) and al-Qaeda, formalized in
early 2014, is of crucial importance. The fracture showcased a
rivalry between two jihadist players with global ambitions, one
of them exerting control over swaths of territory. The question
is how this relationship will unfold in the future, especially in
the light of IS's enduring a 98 percent loss in territory in 2017.[49]
Various scenarios have been outlined but there is no common
opinion.

Some scholars predicted that the two groups may reconcile
in the medium run[50], highlighting their commonalities – like a
shared ideological core of jihadist tenets – but also pinpointing
their tentative rapprochements in the past. In contrast, other
experts contend that such a reconciliation is unlikely at the mo-
ment. It is important to note that contrasts between al-Qaeda
and IS are not confined to the surface – their differences lie not

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[48] On the correlation between repression and insurgencies in the Islamic world,
see M.M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*,
London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003.

[49] As of December 2017, it was reported that the Islamic State has lost 98 per-
cent of its former territories. In addition, thousands of its fighters were killed,
and others left the Syrian-Iraqi area. "Defeat-ISIS Coalition Reflects on 2017,
Looks Forward to 2018", *US Department of Defense*, 1 January 2018.

[50] For example, see B. Hoffman, "The Coming ISIS–al Qaeda Merger", *Foreign
Affairs*, 29 March 2016.

only in personality clashes or the tactical and strategic sphere, but also relate to a deeper doctrinal level[51]. Recently, figures from the two organizations uttered derogatory remarks about the other as well[52].

Giving a final verdict on the groups' relationship is not a straight-forward task. Overall, a comprehensive rapprochement at the leadership level seems unlikely. Perhaps, more restrained, ad hoc instances of cooperation – especially among foot soldiers, rather than medium-level cadres – are a possibility. In particular, the relationship between militants affiliated with al-Qaeda and those siding with IS may vary from place to place, with diverging outcomes in different regions of the globe.

Additionally, jihadist forces have been marked by intra-group fissures. The case of al-Qaeda in Syria is telling: over the last two years, its Syrian affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra underwent a process of reshuffling and rebranding, severing its ties with al-Qaeda in July 2016 and assuming the name "Hayat Tahrir al-Sham" (HTS) in January 2017. At first, observers deemed these changes to be barely cosmetic; however, subsequent disclosures implied that the breach might be deeper than expected. At the same time, a cluster of defectors from HTS founded Tanzim Hurras al-Din, a formation of al-Qaeda loyalists purporting to be its official branch in Syria[53]. Even IS has not been exempt from internal strife – though in a less visible fashion. The group

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[51] S. Stewart, "Can the Islamic State and al Qaeda Find Common Ground?", *Stratfor*, 9 March 2017, https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/can-islamic-state-and-al-qaeda-find-common-ground.

[52] J. Moore, "ISIS Ideologue Calls Al-Qaeda the 'Jews of Jihad' As Rivalry Continues", *Newsweek*, 25 January 2016; L. Dearden, "Al-Qaeda leader denounces Isis 'madness and lies' as two terrorist groups compete for dominance", *The Independent*, 13 January 2017.

[53] Cf. C. Lister, "How al-Qa'ida Lost Control of its Syrian Afliate: The Inside Story", *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2018; T. Refslund Hamming and P. Van Ostaeyen, "The True Story of al-Qaeda's Demise and Resurgence in Syria", *Lawfare*, 8 April 2018; A.J. al-Tamimi, "From Jabhat al-Nusra to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham: Evolution, Approach and Future", *Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung/Al-Nahrain Center For Strategic Studies*, 29 June 2018.

witnessed the rise of an ultra-extremist internal faction, that of the "Hazimis," following the teachings of Saudi cleric Ahmad al-Hazimi[54].

Conclusion

The section of this report on political Islam in the MENA region focuses on Islamist-inspired groups in the Arab Spring and post-Arab Spring context. We attempt to understand what role they played in this setting and, in turn, how such unrest prompted them to recast their thoughts and actions. A few examples (including the cases of Tunisia and Egypt) have been selected to capture the trajectory of Islamist-inspired forces in recent years, and what seems to emerge is a great deal of diversity. After decades of opposition to local governments, mainstream Islamist groups have been put to the test of decision- and policy-making. Salafi players have faced new opportunities and challenges as well. While terminology – i.e. the use of expressions such as "Islamism" or "Salafism" – tends to lump together a plethora of groups sharing some core traits, those labels tell us little about their peculiarities and/or their diverging paths.

Indeed, context does matter. The experience of Morsi in Egypt is not equivalent to that of Ennahda in Tunisia. The Egyptian case also proves that essentialism is ultimately a simplistic, if not fallacious frame for interpreting Islamist-oriented players. The moves of the Salafi al-Nour party are illustrative in this respect: it did not form a single, close-knit front with the Brotherhood in the name of Islam, but rather it played by the rules of pragmatism. Ultimately, in spite of

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[54] T. Refslund Hamming, "The Extremist Wing of the Islamic State", *Jihadica*; V. Mironova, E. Sergatskova, and K. Alhamad, "The Bloody Split Within ISIS", *Foreign Affairs*, 8 December 2017. See also this thread on Twitter: T. Hamming, [ToreRHamming], "The Extremist Wing of the Islamic State II: For some time I wanted to write an update to my @jihadica article on the internal conflict within IS between 'moderates' & 'extremists'. Unfortunately, I haven't found the time, so here comes a 'twitter version'", Twitter post, 15 June 2018.

their ideological distance, al-Nour ended up supporting Sisi. In Tunisia, Ennahda followed an utterly different path than that of the Egyptian Brotherhood, criticizing it and eventually relinquishing the Islamist label. Moreover, fissures in the Islamist galaxy occurred not only along national lines, but also within each country, as shown by the generational divide seen in Egypt and Syria, or the tensions between *hizb* and *haraka*.

If the turmoil of recent years has had an impact on forces operating within institutional boundaries – which, in the end, have acknowledged preexisting local polities – it is also true that these developments have affected seditious players too. The expansion of jihadism in the region, including the rise of IS, has been accompanied by a process of reshuffling, including not only the "bigger" divide between IS and al-Qaeda, but also the rift between the latter and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in Syria and others. In conclusion, the multitude of Islamist-oriented actors – both institutionalized groups and seditious forces – is far from static, but rather is continuously adjusting to changing political and operational circumstances. This metamorphosis is taking multiple directions and shapes and is likely a long way from its end state.

7. Mainstream Institutionalization *vs* Disenfranchised Radicalization in Tunisia

Stefano M. Torelli

Different Pathways: Institutionalization and Radicalization

Tunisia presents one of the most interesting case studies of the evolution of political Islam in Arab countries in the aftermath of the so-called Arab Spring. Ennahda, the most important Islamist party in the country, has managed to become an institutional actor and ruling party after decades of opposition and banishment by the former Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali regime. Ennahda's success is partly the result of a change within the party: it was able to transform itself alongside the institutional changes that Tunisia was experiencing[1]. Ennahda has thus become an inclusive and democratic party that is able to distinguish religion from politics to the point of rejecting the label of an Islamist party and presenting itself instead as a Muslim democratic party[2].

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[1] S. Ounissi, "Ennahda from within: Islamists or 'Muslim Democrats?'", *Rethinking Political Islam Series*, The Brookings Institution, 2016; R. Yildirim, "Transformation of the Ennahda Movement from Islamic Jama'ah to Political Party," *Insight Turkey*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2017, pp. 189-214.

[2] In an article written for *Foreign Affairs* in 2016, the founder of Ennahda Rashid

While on the one hand the biggest force in Tunisian political Islam has managed to make such a radical change, on the other hand, some Tunisian Islamist actors have emerged as alternatives to Ennahda, if not openly denouncing it. In fact, due to Ennahda's transformation, Tunisian society has seen the emergence and development of different forms of Salafism[3], which existed before, but rose in prominence only after 2011. Since 2011, various groups have sprung up that embrace the Salafist ideology; however, they are not openly jihadist organizations. The most significant Salafist opposition group has been the Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia (AST). At the height of its popularity between 2012 and 2013, the organization boasted at least two thousand followers[4]. At that time, its strategy focused on social activities, which aimed to spread the Salafist message to the population. From 2011 onwards, other Salafist parties were born; however, they have generally been smaller and less popular than AST. Nonetheless, some of these groups attained institutional recognition and are participating in the democratic life of the country[5].

Among the most unexpected developments in Tunisia has been an unprecedented wave of radicalization and the proliferation of jihadist attacks. Tunisia had the highest number of foreign fighters who traveled to fight in Syria, Iraq, and Libya between 2012 and 2017, totaling at least three thousand people, according to international and national sources[6]. Moreover,

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al-Ghannushi himself wrote: "Ennahda has moved beyond its origins as an Islamist party and has fully embraced a new identity as a party of Muslim democrats." See R. Ghannouchi, "From Political Islam to Muslim Democracy: The Ennahda Party and the Future of Tunisia", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 95, no. 5, 2016, pp. 1-6.

[3] Salafism is a current of political Islam, characterized by a literalist interpretation of Islam. For a comprehensive categorization of it, see among the others Q. Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi movement", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2006, pp. 207-239.

[4] This in an estimate based on field interviews and on the study that the author made on the Facebook profile of AST in the summer of 2012.

[5] S. Torelli, F. Merone, and F. Cavatorta, "Salafism in Tunisia: Challenges and Opportunities for Democratization", *Middle East Policy*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2012, pp. 140-154.

[6] R. Barrett, "Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of

the country suffered a campaign of devastating terrorist attacks. The attacks first targeted security forces, especially on the border with Algeria. Starting in 2015, attacks targeted tourist sites – most notably the Bardo Museum in Tunis and a resort in Sousse – which killed dozens of people (many of them Western tourists) and caused the collapse of the tourism sector, an important pillar of the Tunisian economy.

Tunisian jihadism has peculiar characteristics, as it cannot be traced back to a unique and structured organization, but rather is made up of small networks that are often independent of each other. In studying the causes of the radicalization process affecting hundreds of young Tunisians, internal and structural factors as well as external factors spurred the appeal of the jihadist ideology and its operational evolution. The internal and structural factors include regional disparities, difficult socio-economic conditions, and political and social marginalization. As for the external factors, the emergence of the Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq and the conflict in Libya were the primary ones[7].

Political Islam in Power: Ennahda's Experience

Tunisian political Islam is inextricably linked to the Ennahda party and its historic founder Rashid al-Ghannushi. The party was born in the 1970s with the name "Movement of the Islamic Tendency" (*Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique*) as an Islamist opposition to the regime of Habib Bourguiba (who was in power from 1957-87)[8]. Between the 1980s and the beginning of

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Returnee", The Soufan Center, 24 October 2017.

[7] S. Torelli, "Radicalisation and Jihadist Threat in Tunisia: Internal Root Causes, External Connections and Possible Responses", in W. Mühlberger (ed.), *Transformation in Tunisia: The First Five Years*, Euromesco Joint Policy Study, no. 5, January 2017, pp. 108-127.

[8] For a deep and comprehensive story of the emergence and the evolution of Ennahda in Tunisia, see A. Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017; A. Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi. A Democrat Within Islamism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011; M.E. Hamdi,

the 1990s, after a brief period in which Tunisian President Ben Ali had tried to co-opt the party within the political system, Ennahda was banned and its members were for the most part arrested or fled abroad[9]. A unique characteristic of Ennahda, compared to other Islamist parties, was its ability to merge the Islamist ideology with social issues related to employment and economic crisis, thus immediately demonstrating the capacity to adapt itself to the particular context in which it operated. Nonetheless, Ennahda presented itself as an Islamist movement, pursuing an Islamist-oriented agenda.

After the fall of Ben Ali in 2011, the provisional institutions legalized the party and it has since been able to participate in the electoral process, establishing itself as the most popular party in the country. First, in 2011 it formed a government from a majority position with two other parties. They were the Congress for Republic and Ettakatol, two leftist and secular parties. From 2014 onwards, Ennahda formed a coalition government with the secularist block Nidaa Tounes[10].

The experience of Ennahda after the fall of the Ben Ali regime and the beginning of the democratization process in Tunisia is singular in the Arab and Islamic world. Ennahda's political choices since 2011 have been the subject of several studies of international and Islamist politics. The transformation that led the party to be an institutional actor after years of anti-government positions has been presented by many as a possible model for other Islamist-inspired parties in the Middle East and North Africa[11]. One of the most fitting comparisons

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The Politicisation of Islam: A Case Study of Tunisia, Boulder, Westview Press, 2000.

[9] For a deep reconstruction of the Ennahda members' destiny after the ban in the early nineties, see M.E. Hamdi (2000).

[10] In the national elections for the Constituent Assembly, Ennahda won the majority of seats, with 37% of total votes, and formed a government with the Congress for the Republic (CPR) and Ettakatol. In 2014, in the first Parliamentary elections after the promulgation of the new Constitution, Ennahda won about 28% of the votes, behind the secular block Nidaa Tounes. The two parties then formed a coalition government, still in power in 2018.

[11] F. Cavatorta and F. Merone, "Moderation through exclusion? The journey of the

is with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Although these two actors initially undertook similar political-institutional pathways (internal recognition by the new post-revolt institutions, participation in the first post-authoritarian elections, victory in the elections, and subsequent affirmation as ruling parties), they differed in political strategy. In Tunisia, Ennahda became the protagonist in the transition process, while the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, after a brief stint in power, suffered harsh repression by the army and was officially declared a terrorist organization in 2013 in the revived authoritarian context created by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi[12].

Far from justifying the *coup d'état* against the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 2013, this reflection aims to bring attention to the different paths Ennahda in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt took in response to their similar situations: the fall of a long-standing authoritarian ruler and the subsequent possibility to democratize themselves and take part in the electoral process. The Egyptian Brotherhood under the leadership of former President Mohamed Morsi was not able to rule through inclusive decision-making processes. The Brotherhood failed to pay due attention to the demands of the opposition and contributed to the polarization of Egyptian politics and society. On the other hand, Ennahda has shown a greater ability to adapt to Tunisia's particular political situation in the post-authoritarian transition phase[13]. Ennahda's adaptation was manifested in: the formation of two coalition governments with parties of opposite political fields; the renunciation of some political battles, such as introducing sharia as a source of law in the new Constitution; the condemnation of the most radical forms of Islamism; and finally, with the 2016 Congress, the definitive renunciation of certain

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Tunisian Ennahda from fundamentalist to conservative party", *Democratization*, vol. 20, no. 5, 2013, pp. 857-875.

[12] "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood declared 'terrorist group'", *BBC*, 25 December 2013.

[13] M. Marks, "Tunisia's Ennahda: Rethinking Islamism in the context of ISIS and the Egyptian coup", *Rethinking Political Islam Series*, Working Paper, The Brookings Institution, 2015.

religious claims, opting for a clear division between religion and politics. In this way, Ennahda managed to block possible counter reactions from secular forces close to the former regime and to remain a leading player in the national political scene.

Initially, during the process of internal transformation of both groups, Ennahda's path was compared to that of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey[14]. Both parties emerged as Islamist parties, were able to adapt themselves to the context in which they operated, respected democratic values, and later declared themselves transformed from Islamist parties to Muslim conservative parties, thus renouncing the pursuit of Islamist goals in the public sphere. However, as the parties evolved, a divergence emerged in their understanding of the function of the party within the state. Whereas Ennahda carried out its political activity in a context of democratization and with respect for pluralism and democratic rules, the AKP has increasingly shown intolerance for political and social opposition and supported authoritarian acts at the hands of the government's institutions.

More recently, Ennahda has been accused of recreating an elitist political system too distant from the needs of its citizens. Far from embodying the progressive and revolutionary political force that it set out to establish since its foundation, Ennahda has become institutionalized to the point of becoming an integral part of the system that, for many Tunisian citizens, is recreating the dynamics of the Ben Ali era[15]. Finally, it should be emphasized that the unprecedented choice of the party to separate the religious from the political has unwittingly created an opportunity for the most extreme Islamist forces to fill the gap left by the party and to proselytize among that part of the population most susceptible to radicalization.

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[14] S. Torelli, "The 'AKP Model' and Tunisia's al-Nahda: From convergence to competition?", *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2012, pp. 65-83; M. Marks, "Tunisia's Islamists and the 'Turkish Model'", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2017, pp. 102-115.

[15] A. Boubekeur, "Islamists, Secularists and Old Regime Elites in Tunisia: Bargained Competition", *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2016, pp. 107-127.

The Emergence of Salafism and the Reaction of the State

The fall of the former regime also created a window of opportunity for new voices in Tunisian society, which have emerged more easily in the recently liberalized landscape. Among these, there are the movements and organizations inspired by a more traditionalist and rigid interpretation of Islam than the one represented by Ennahda: so-called Salafism[16]. Some Salafist organizations existed in Tunisia prior to the ousting of Ben Ali, although they were in hiding and acted under the regime's constraints. The processes of democratization that began after 2011 have paradoxically helped the Salafist organizations spread more easily and quickly, given the lack of control mechanisms that might otherwise repress them.

The disappearance of the regime is one factor explaining the greater diffusion of the Salafist ideology in the immediate post-Ben Ali period. Another element to take into consideration is Ennahda's parallel institutional pathway. At a time when the party of al-Ghannushi was settling into more moderate positions, the most radical wing of Tunisian political Islam progressively distanced itself from Ennahda. The Salafists deemed the Ennahda party too accommodating and too far removed from the original goals of political Islam and attempted to build internal opposition, giving voice and representation to those who did not condone Ennahda's choices. Between 2011 and 2012, several Salafist organizations were born.

The most significant Salafist group that emerged was AST. AST was led by Tunisians already known for their radical positions in the years before the fall of Ben Ali. In particular, its leader Abu Iyadh had fought in Afghanistan, was subsequently

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[16] Torelli et al. (2012); A. Wolf, "An Islamist 'renaissance'? Religion and politics in post-revolutionary Tunisia", *The Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2013, pp. 560-573; T.H. Donker, "Re-emerging Islamism in Tunisia: Repositioning Religion in Politics and Society", *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2013, pp. 207-224.

arrested in Turkey and extradited to Tunisia, where he was sentenced to life imprisonment for terrorism. After the fall of the regime, he was freed as part of a general amnesty and was able to begin his proselytizing activities for the creation of a new Salafi movement[17]. However, AST was not an openly jihadist movement, though they were opposed to the current governance structure. Rather, it was a quietist kind of organization, focused more on *dawa* (proselytizing) activities than on revolutionary and armed activities typical of jihadist Salafism[18]. Its attractiveness – especially in some areas of the country such as the suburbs of Tunis and the governorate of Kairouan, as well as among the youngest members of the population – was initially significant, as witnessed by the number of people (almost 2,000) attending the annual rallies in Kairouan. The goal of AST, at this stage, was to be viewed by the population as an actor able to compensate for the shortcomings of institutions in the provision of basic services such as assistance to sick people, the distribution of food and clothing to the neediest families, and charity aimed at improving the living conditions of the weakest in society[19]. AST's communication strategy has been one of its winning weapons, thanks to the dissemination of messages and videos via social media networks and an ad hoc satellite channel. In this way, AST has gradually attracted more followers, acting as a welfare provider in place of the state.

Alongside AST, other Salafist organizations have arisen, such as Hizb al-Tahrir and Jabhat al-Islah. The latter has maintained better relations with Ennahda and has also been legalized, as happened to the al-Nour party in Egypt. However, these parties

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[17] S. Torelli, "A Portrait of Tunisia's Ansar al-Shari'a Leader Abu Iyad al-Tunisi: His Strategy on Jihad", *Militant Leadership Monitor*, The Jamestown Foundation, vol. 4, no. 8, 2013, pp. 9-11.

[18] We follow the categorization between quietist Salafism, political Salafism, and revolutionary (or jihadist) Salafism found in Q. Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi movement", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2006, pp. 207-239.

[19] D. Gartenstein-Ross, B. Moreng, and K. Soucy, "Raising the Stakes: Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia's Shift to Jihad", International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, 2014.

have much less popularity than AST and have not been able to exert considerable weight in the Tunisian political landscape and society. The relative success of AST compared to the Salafist political parties can be explained precisely by the different strategies and by the different type of audiences that these movements addressed. In their own way, Hizb al-Tahrir and Jabhat al-Islah remained personal and "elitist" parties, with few direct links to the territory and the population. On the contrary, AST's relative popularity has been due to its work in the most remote and disadvantaged areas of the country. With this in mind, it is possible to compare AST's strategy to that of populist movements in Europe, which have built their electoral success by taking advantage of the socio-economic crisis of the weakest citizens and using it as a tool for propaganda.

As far as its evolution is concerned, AST continued to pursue the ideological proselytizing that formed the basis for the subsequent episodes of radicalization among young Tunisians, which sometimes resulted in acts of violence. However, it remains debatable whether and to what extent AST has been directly responsible for the campaign of terrorist attacks starting in the spring of 2013[20]. In 2013, AST was designated a terrorist organization by the Tunisian government and, from then on, has been banned in the country. This led to a campaign of indiscriminate arrests of hundreds of people accused of having ties to the organization and of following a radical version of Islam[21]. However, it must be noted that AST has neither officially declared itself a quietist Salafi movement nor adopted an openly jihadist strategy. Therefore, there are still doubts about the organization's actual involvement in the attacks. This does not

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[20] Between 2013 and 2015, even before the attacks against the Bardo Museum and the tourist resort in Sousse, almost 100 members of the Tunisian security forces were killed in attacks, especially on the border with Algeria. For more about these attacks, W. Mejri, "Terrorisme en Tunisie: Carte Interactive Des Evenements Apres Le 14 Janvier", *Inkyfada*, 14 June 2014.

[21] International Crisis Group, "Jihadist violence in Tunisia: The urgent need for a national strategy", *Middle East and North Africa Briefing*, no. 50, 2016, pp. 1-18.

mean that AST was not a radical and anti-government movement, but the banning of AST could have been an attempt to offer reassurance to the public that Ennahda did not support radical Islamist groups rather than a consequence of the actual involvement of AST in the terrorist acts that occurred in Tunisia from the end of 2012 onwards. Regardless of what truly happened, the crackdown against suspected Salafists all over the country since 2013 has certainly contributed to polarizing political positions and radicalizing hundreds of young Tunisians who felt themselves unfairly persecuted and marginalized by the new post-revolutionary institutions[22].

Jihadism in Tunisia: Evolution of a Vital Threat

The uniqueness of the transition in Tunisia is that mainstream political Islam has managed to become a founding element and a protagonist of the political transition of the country, yet there has also been an alarming trend toward radicalization and several episodes of jihadism that have endangered the democratization process. As already mentioned, jihadism in Tunisia has taken different forms over the past few years. Starting in 2013, violent jihadist activities targeted Tunisian security forces on the western border with Algeria. Since 2015, foreign civilians and tourists also became a target. The terrorists' goal was to damage the national economy through repelling tourism[23]. Although in 2013 the Tunisian government identified AST as directly responsible for the campaign of attacks against security forces in the Jebel Chaambi mountains (an area near the border between Tunisia and Algeria) between 2012 and 2013, these

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[22] G. Fahmi and H. Meddeb, "Market for Jihad. Radicalization in Tunisia", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015.

[23] S. Torelli and A. Varvelli, "New trends in North African jihadism: Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia and Libya", in A. Plebani (ed.), *New (and old) patterns of jihadism: al-Qa'ida, the Islamic State and beyond*, Institute for International Political Studies, 2014.

fighters actually had roots in Algeria with the al-Qaeda affili-
ated organization: al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)[24].

Taking advantage of the instability that emerged in the area
after the Arab revolts of 2011, AQIM has repeatedly tried to
expand from Algeria southward (into the Sahel and particu-
larly into Mali where the organization has been active since
2007) and eastward toward Tunisia[25]. The campaign of violence
in Tunisia, especially in the western mountain area of Jebel
Chaambi should be examined in this context. The fact that the
attacks were carried out near the border with Algeria and that
the majority of the fighters arrested or killed in this phase were
Algerians – confirmed by Algerian and Tunisian intelligence –
indicates that the string of violence fits in with AQIM's ex-
pansionary goals. These militants became the nucleus of the
main jihadist organization that emerged in Tunisia during this
time known as the Uqba ibn Nafi brigade. Therefore, from the
operational point of view, jihadism in Tunisia post-uprisings
began more as an externally directed phenomenon, rather than
an internally led one. In other words, the first appearance of
jihadist-linked violence in Tunisia was a direct effect of the at-
tempts of AQIM to spread from Algeria to Tunisia. Only in a
second phase did Tunisian nationals join the armed groups at
the border with Algeria and, later, the radicalization process in-
volving hundreds of Tunisians grabbed the country's attention.

In a later phase, hundreds of young Tunisians radicalized and
contributed to the evolution of an internal form of jihadism ca-
pable of jeopardizing the political transition. There are internal
and external factors that contributed to the rapid spread of the
jihadist ideology in Tunisia. Internal factors such as the eco-
nomic, political, and social marginalization of large sections of
the population – especially in the most peripheral areas of the
country – and the return to authoritarian practices as an effect

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[24] S. Torelli, "Tunisia's elusive jihadist network", *Terrorism Monitor*, The Jamestown
Foundation, vol. 11, no. 12, 2013, pp. 4-6.
[25] S. Boeke, "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Terrorism, insurgency, or organ-
ized crime?", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 27, no. 5, 2016, pp. 914-936.

of the new 2015 anti-terrorism law played a crucial role[26]. The latter focused almost exclusively on the security aspect, rather than on the implementation of policies aimed at prevention and de-radicalization. In this way, the Tunisian authorities indirectly effected the opposite of what was intended: catalyzing more radicalization among the population[27].

There have also been external factors that have influenced Tunisian internal dynamics. The emergence of the self-declared Caliphate in Syria and Iraq and the rapid spread of the IS-style jihadist ideology gave many disillusioned and marginalized citizens a new ideological path to channel their discontent. In this way, the jihadist ideology became a concrete alternative to their frustration with the state, which they perceived as responsible for their marginalization. Additionally, the conflict in Libya provided opportunities at an operational level for increased radical activity inside Tunisia. The Libyan conflict created a safe haven for IS-linked organizations, which in turn provided effective networks for Tunisian cells and individuals wishing to receive training and logistical support inside Libya in order to return and carry out attacks in Tunisia. The militants who carried out the two 2015 attacks in Tunis and Sousse received weapons and training in Libya before returning to Tunisia to carry out operations[28].

Unlike other forms of jihadism that emerged in the same years in Europe or in other countries of the region (like Egypt), Tunisian jihadism seemingly does not have a clear chain of command and control. Rather, the profile of the Tunisian jihadist is the so-called "individual" jihadist. Pushed by a combination of different factors, many young Tunisians have embraced the jihadist ideology through personal contacts (family, neighbors,

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[26] "Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Tunisia", International Republican Institute, 2017; V. Colombo, "Multiple Layers of Marginalization as a Paradigm of Tunisian Hotbeds of Jihadism", in A. Varvelli (ed.), *Jihadist Hotbeds: Understanding Local Radicalization Processes*, Institute for International Political Studies, 2016, pp. 107-120.

[27] International Crisis Group (2016).

[28] "Tunisia says hotel attacker trained in Libya", *Al Jazeera*, 1 July 2015.

or friends), local preachers, and the internet or have become radicalized in prison (one of the most likely places for radicalization)[29]. Some managed to connect with networks that allowed them to perpetrate terrorist attacks while others remain potentially active and continue to constitute a hypothetical threat to national security. The lack of structure and hierarchical organization poses great difficulty in combating this type of jihadism.

A primary role in the unique structure is played also by cross-border organized crime networks – between Tunisia and Algeria as well as between Tunisia and Libya – engaged in illegal trafficking and in the black economy[30]. As in other contexts, the presence of illegal trafficking can be exploited by jihadist groups, which can fit into the smuggling chain for their own purposes. Therefore, to combat this kind of jihadism, preventive action is needed. The intervention should target different levels of social life and not just address security concerns. Tools through which to prevent the emergence of new forms of radicalism include but are not limited to: a better management of social imbalances; the creation of socio-economic alternatives to informal economy activities, especially in border areas; policies for social, economic, and infrastructural development in the central-western areas of the country; and the development of de-radicalization programs and social inclusion for those at risk.

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[29] A comprehensive report of the radicalization in Tunisia, including 83 case studies of individuals convicted of jihadism-related offenses, has been released by the Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies (ITES): *Assessing the Threat Posed by Tunisian Foreign Fighters*, 2018.

[30] H. Meddeb, *Peripheral Vision: How Europe can help preserve Tunisia's fragile democracy*, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 13 January 2017; International Crisis Group, "Tunisia's Borders: Jihadism and Contraband", *Middle East and North Africa Report*, no. 148, 2013; M. Kartas, *On the Edge? Trafficking and Insecurity at the Tunisian-Libyan Border*, Working Paper, Geneva, Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 2013.

Conclusion

The trajectory of political Islam in post-revolutionary Tunisia has varied greatly due to the different approaches adopted by Islamist groups in the country. The once anti-government and opposition movement Ennahda has adapted itself to the political transitional landscape and, in such a context, has managed to institutionalize itself to the extent of becoming acknowledged as the ruling political party – a sweeping change compared to its status before the ouster of Ben Ali. As an effect of this transformation, Ennahda has been perceived by some as a new elitist actor responsible for the socio-economic and political marginalization of many citizens, especially in the most remote areas of Tunisia. Thus, Ennahda's inclusion in the Tunisian system went hand in hand with a fracture within the Islamist landscape itself, causing the emergence of new radical and Salafist organizations. The latter were able to operate in the new democratizing context until the harsh repression of 2013, when authorities indiscriminately targeted hundreds of Islamist individuals, unconcerned about their actual involvement in illicit and criminal activities. Against this background, a radicalization process began in the country involving hundreds of young citizens who felt excluded from the transitional process. The spread of the IS-fueled ideology led more and more Tunisians to embrace jihadism and, ultimately, go to Syria, Iraq, and Libya as foreign fighters or organize terrorist attacks inside Tunisia. Thus, while it started as an external and imported phenomenon originating from AQIM's expansionist goals, jihadism became an internal threat to Tunisia. Paradoxically, the moderation and the inclusion of mainstream political Islam groups in the country has been in part responsible for the marginalization of other Islamist groups, leading to polarization. The challenge for the future of political Islam in Tunisia and for the national political transition itself will be to make possible an enduring integration of Islamists within the system (as has been the case for Ennahda), while preventing the diffusion of radicalism as a reaction to the contradictions created by the transitional phase.

8. What Happened to Political Islam in Libya?

Mary Fitzgerald

Seven years after the fall of Muammar Qaddhafi, Libya remains caught in the power struggles that triggered a civil conflict in mid-2014 and continue today in the absence of robust governance structures.

While post-Qaddhafi Libya's over-arching conflict is not ideological but rather a scramble between elites for control over the country's resources, polarization between Islamist (or those deemed Islamist-leaning or allied) and non-Islamist actors and factions has played a role. This rivalry has often had more to do with narratives influenced by external actors – particularly Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, both of which have militarily and otherwise supported anti-Islamist Libyan proxies – than actual Libyan realities.

Unlike Egypt or Tunisia, Libya does not have a defined secular/liberal versus Islamist divide. Since 2011, no mainstream party, faction, or political figure has publicly self-described as secular or liberal. Additionally, public opinion surveys since 2011 have consistently reported a majority of Libyans favoring *sharia* as a main source of legislation[1]. Historically, Libya's main-

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[1] "Seeking Security: Public Opinion Survey in Libya", National Democratic Institute and JMW Consulting, August 2013, pp. 12; "Seeking Security: Public Opinion Survey in Libya", National Democratic Institute and JMW Consulting, November 2013, pp. 27; "An analysis of the public opinion trends in Libya", *Middle East Monitor*, 10 May 2014.

stream political Islamist groups such as the Libyan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, were largely movements in exile due to Qaddafi's persecution of dissidents and his particular animus toward Islamist currents. Islamists of all hues were hounded by Qaddafi until the 2000s, when his son Saif al-Islam al-Qaddafi began a rapprochement with the Brotherhood – though it remained banned as an organization and members continued to be monitored – and a dialogue with imprisoned leaders of the jihadist Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) led to the latter's disavowal of armed struggle against the regime. Repression by the regime meant mainstream Islamist groups like the Brotherhood never had the opportunity to develop a foothold in Libyan society through charitable and educational activities as they had in Egypt. Moreover, decades of demonizing by Qaddafi – who often denounced them as "terrorists" – meant that suspicion of Islamists more generally remained deeply embedded in the popular Libyan imagination.

From an early stage in the post-Qaddafi transition, a number of political and armed actors and factions exploited Qaddafi-era tropes about Islamists not only to attack and undermine self-described Islamists, but also used the term "Islamist" as a potent political smear against many who were not[2]. At times, even United Nations (UN) representatives and foreign diplomats were accused of being Islamists or sympathizers, as were prominent members of the Senussi family that ruled Libya before the 1969 military coup that brought Qaddafi to power. Qaddafi himself employed a variation of this ruse in 2011 when he sought to prevent the uprising against his regime from gaining further momentum by telling Libyans it had been orchestrated by radical Islamists. Many regime loyalists, now more confident than at any point since Qaddafi's ousting, still cleave to this narrative of what happened in 2011.

After 2011, this tactic of broad brushstroke labelling and smearing took its most significant turn when Khalifa Haftar, a former Qaddafi-era general who participated in the 1969 coup

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[2] M. Fitzgerald, "Libya's New Power Brokers?", *Foreign Policy*, 27 August 2014.

before later defecting, launched an offensive in May 2014 which he presented as an anti-terrorism operation. Heavily inspired by the crackdown that followed President Mohammed Morsi's overthrow by the Egyptian military in 2013, Haftar – who in February 2014 was accused by then prime minister Ali Zeidan of attempting a coup – targeted a wide range of factions and individuals. These included not only the Muslim Brotherhood, which he repeatedly described as the "main enemy" he wanted to "purge" from Libya, but also non-Islamists who accused him of seeking to impose himself as ruler. Haftar – whose supporters openly compared to Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Egypt – denounced all opponents and critics as "terrorists" or terrorist sympathizers. When a militia battle for control of Tripoli later that summer ended with the routing of armed groups then allied with Haftar, the Libya Dawn alliance that subsequently took over the capital was branded "Islamist" even though it contained a mix of Islamist and non-Islamist factions, including from the Amazigh or Berber minorities. All these tactics helped precipitate Libya's descent into conflict in 2014, and the corrosive effect on the country's political and civil spheres can still be felt today.

Fear of Haftar's ambitions and anger over his scattergun approach also led a number of factions and individuals to radicalize and ally with designated organizations like Ansar al-Sharia, which fought his forces in Benghazi, Libya's second largest city. The civil conflict also provided a space for the Islamic State (IS) to expand and control territory in the country, eventually dislodged both from Derna – where it first announced itself in 2014 – and its subsequent stronghold in Sirte, in both cases by forces that were predominantly anti-Haftar.

Between the first post-Qaddafi elections in 2012 and 2014, the conflation of Islamists who were participating in the democratic process with more radical elements who rejected it, along with the casual use of the term "Islamist" as a political smear, helped obscure the true weight of mainstream Islamists. The conflation was further fed by partisan local media owned or funded by anti-Islamist figures – some of them linked to

Egypt and the UAE. Islamist parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Justice & Construction Party (JCP), trailed after non-Islamist groupings in the July 2012 national ballot that produced the General National Congress (GNC). Yet once in the GNC, the JCP proved more adept at forging alliances within. Nevertheless, the widespread peddling of conspiracy theories portraying Libya's fractious Islamist milieu as a monolith plotting to take over the country made groups like the Brotherhood appear – in the popular mind at least – far more powerful than they actually were. Meanwhile, the rise of ostensibly quietist Madkhali Salafists within the country's security, religious, and social spheres since 2014 confounded many. Madkhalis follow the Saudi cleric Rabi al-Madkhali and are fiercely opposed to political Islamists like the Brotherhood. In eastern Libya, their ascendance was largely due to their support of Haftar, who not only enlisted them militarily for his operation, but also empowered them in the religious sphere.

Libya is still dealing with the fallout from the civil conflict starting in 2014. It was fueled by both domestic and foreign attempts to reduce Libya's complexities to a simplistic Islamist versus anti-Islamist dichotomy. This narrative did not reflect the patchwork of fluid alliances and loyalties that have characterized the post-Qaddafi period. While a sustainable and inclusive settlement remains elusive, politically engaged Islamists – including the now much diminished Muslim Brotherhood – are mulling their future and weighing how they may fit in whatever new political landscape emerges. Jihadists retain a presence in Libya particularly in the south; including IS and al-Qaeda-inspired groups. The growing power and influence of Madkhali Salafists, meanwhile, has discomfited many across the political spectrum – from the Muslim Brotherhood to more liberal-leaning Libyans – who fear their ultra-conservative agenda.

Finding Their Place:
The Muslim Brotherhood in Libya

Outlawed by Qaddafi, the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood faced severe repression for much of his forty-two-year rule. Many of its members were executed or jailed. Several figures in the Brotherhood's current leadership were incarcerated in Abu Salim, the infamous Tripoli prison in which thousands of Libyan dissidents were disappeared and some 1,200 were massacred by regime forces in 1996. Others were driven into exile, joining Libyan diaspora communities in Britain, Switzerland, Canada, Ireland, and the United States.

Despite a reconciliation with the Qaddafi regime in later years, which allowed for the release of imprisoned members, the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood joined the 2011 uprising in its first weeks. Brotherhood figures helped form revolutionary brigades, organized humanitarian assistance, and took up key roles within the National Transitional Council (NTC), a body which not only represented the anti-Qaddafi forces, but also laid the groundwork for the transitional period[3]. The following year, the Brotherhood, which sought to expand its influence within the local councils that had sprung up across the country during the uprising, registered itself as a non-governmental organization. The Brotherhood also launched the JCP, an affiliated political party, insisting it was organizationally independent from the movement and open to everyone. While the JCP secured the second highest number of seats allocated to parties in the 2012 elections, it was a relatively poor result compared with the electoral successes of Brotherhood affiliates in Egypt and Tunisia post-2011.

What infuriated the JCP's political opponents in the GNC was its ability to form coalitions and play (often unsavory) politics in a country where the democratic process was new. Some

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[3] M. Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place: Libya's Islamists During and After Revolution", in P. Cole and B. McQuinn (eds.), *The Libyan Revolution and Its Aftermath*, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 177-204.

Brotherhood figures had links – often through family – to armed groups in east and west Libya. Others helped forge a marriage of convenience with powerful factions from Misrata, particularly after the Libya Dawn alliance took control of Tripoli in summer 2014. The JCP and its allies had fared badly in June elections for the House of Representatives (HoR) which was to replace the GNC, and this poor showing was one of the factors, along with fear of Haftar, that led to Libya Dawn. A number of pro-Libya Dawn GNC members, including several Islamists, subsequently formed a government to compete with the then internationally-recognized government of Abdullah al-Thinni which had fled to eastern Libya.

While Haftar's talk of "cleansing" Libya of the Brotherhood was partly aimed at currying favor with his sponsors in Egypt and the UAE, his self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) acted on it on the ground. Hundreds of Brotherhood-linked families were driven from Benghazi and other parts of eastern Libya as the LNA secured and expanded control.

The Brotherhood has disappeared from most of eastern Libya, but it retains influence in the country's western flank, where members and associates hold positions of power in political, security, and economic sectors. The alliance with Misrata, however, has frayed. Many Misratans believe the alliance damaged the city, which never had a natural Brotherhood constituency to begin with.

More recently, mindful of the reputational damage it suffered in recent years, the Libyan Brotherhood engaged in internal debates over its future. Some members believe that the movement is so tarnished in the eyes of the wider population, it should dissolve and re-emerge under a different name, as happened with Brotherhood offshoots in other countries. Others counter that if the Brotherhood exits the political scene in any way, its opponents will prevent its return.

Whatever the Brotherhood decides to do, it will have an impact on Libya's political dynamics. The conversation about whether the group should be banned – as many within Haftar's

camp demand – inevitably leads to wider debates over what constitutes an inclusive civil state. With the Brotherhood's arm reaching into so many spheres, it will remain an influential current despite its limited electoral appeal. The JCP's participation in the UN-led dialogue process that birthed the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) and support for the Government of National Accord (GNA) that subsequently emerged has allowed the party – and by extension the Brotherhood – to maintain political relevance. The High State Council, one of the bodies established under the LPA, includes some JCP figures given it is comprised of GNC members. The Council's current president, Khaled al-Mishri, is also a JCP member.

Libya's Jihadists: Past, Present and Future

Libya's jihadist milieu can be divided along generational lines, starting with those who came of age in the 1980s. Many from that older generation travelled to Afghanistan to join the battle against Soviet-backed forces. On their return to Libya, these veterans established a number of groups in opposition to Qaddhafi, the largest of which was the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), which is now defunct. Several former LIFG figures, including the group's last leader, Abdelhakim Belhaj, played key roles in the 2011 uprising, with LIFG rebranded as the Libyan Islamic Movement for Change (LIMC). In the years that followed, members of the former LIFG went in different directions. Some, including Belhaj, formed political parties and ran for election, though with little success[4]. Others served as deputy ministers in government, most notably Khaled Sherif at the Ministry of Defense and Abdulbaset Buhliqa at the Ministry of Interior, where they were accused by opponents of favoring Islamist-flavored armed groups within Libya's

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[4] The only former senior LIFG figure to win a seat was Abdulwahab al-Qaid – brother of Abu Yahya al-Libi, the senior al-Qaeda figure killed in a US drone strike in Pakistan in 2012 – who became a GNC member in 2012.

fractured security sector. The former LIFG fragmented to such a degree that a handful turned against their erstwhile comrades and supported Haftar's operation in 2014. Other LIFG members backed those fighting Haftar in eastern Libya or joined the Libya Dawn alliance in western Libya[5]. With the arrival of the UN-backed GNA in Tripoli in early 2016, shifts in the capital's militia balance of power meant that former LIFG elements lost influence. Although some figures, like Belhaj, now a wealthy businessman, still hold political ambitions.

The fact that so many senior figures of the former LIFG and others from the so-called "Arab-Afghan" generation of jihadists embraced a democratic trajectory for post-Qaddhafi Libya did not sit well with the second and third generation, who tilt toward more radical ideologies and reject democracy as un-Islamic. Many of that second generation had flocked to Iraq after 2003, where they enlisted with al-Qaeda linked groups, while hundreds of the third generation fought in Syria after 2011, many joining IS there. Some returned from Syria to establish Libya's first IS branch in the eastern town of Derna with assistance from senior non-Libyan IS figures. In fact, the IS affiliate in Libya has always been dominated by foreigners at the leadership level, with non-Libyans – particularly from Tunisia, Egypt, and sub-Saharan Africa – also a large component of its rank and file.

A coalition of forces eventually drove IS from Derna. These forces included the Derna Mujahideen Shura Council, an umbrella group comprised of fighters led by local jihadists and former LIFG cadre. They joined army personnel who rejected Haftar. In Qaddhafi's hometown of Sirte, IS tapped into local grievances springing from the city's marginalization after the 2011 uprising. Sirte became the Islamic State's stronghold in Libya until the summer months of 2016 when a coalition of Misrata-dominated forces known as Bunyan al-Marsous (BAM) launched an operation. Aided by almost five hundred

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[5] Author interviews with former members of the LIFG, 2014-2016.

US airstrikes, the BAM coalition successfully dislodged the militants[6]. Those who fled Sirte scattered south-west toward Sabha, west toward Sabratha, and south-east toward the Sudanese border. According to most foreign intelligence estimates, IS now has upwards of six hundred fighters in Libya. Most are spread across the south-west and central regions with notable concentrations around Bani Walid and the area south of Sirte, including the Jufra hinterland[7].

A greater challenge in the longer term is the possible emergence of more locally-rooted armed groups that, while not necessarily affiliated with al-Qaeda or even explicitly jihadist, share similar ideologies. The growth of Ansar al-Sharia (AS) in cities and towns – most notably Benghazi, Derna, Sirte, and Ajdabiya – between 2012 and 2014 is instructive. At its core, AS was an armed group but it gained popular support and drove recruitment with a strategy that focused on preaching and charitable activities. It was eventually put on the UN's al-Qaeda sanctions list. In May 2017, decimated by Haftar's operation and weakened by defections to other al-Qaeda linked groups or IS, Ansar al-Sharia announced its dissolution. With Haftar's forces now controlling much of Derna, in addition to Benghazi and Ajdabiya, there are fewer opportunities for jihadist groups in eastern Libyan cities and towns where they once operated. However, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and al-Mourabitoun retain a presence in Libya; particularly in the south. The emergence of new indigenous AQ-flavored groups – possibly feeding on the grievances of displaced populations, such as those driven from Benghazi by Haftar's operation – should not be ruled out.

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[6] P. Bergen and A. Sims, "Airstrikes and Civilian Casualties in Libya Since the 2011 NATO Intervention", *New America*, 20 June 2018.

[7] M. Fitzgerald, "A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players", European Council on Foreign Relations, December 2016.

The Rise of the Madkhalis

While the fortunes of the Muslim Brotherhood and other mainstream Islamist groups have waned in Libya since 2014, a particular current of Salafism – known colloquially as Madkhalism – is in the ascendant. As sworn doctrinal enemies of the Brotherhood and other manifestations of political Islam, Madkhalis now dominate significant parts of the security sector in east and west Libya and play a key role in policing and intelligence gathering[8]. The resulting leverage enabled Madkhalis to take over mosques and other religious institutions. It also emboldened them to restrict civil society and cultural activities in accordance with their ultra-conservative worldview. Madkhalis have also targeted Libya's Sufi population and the Ibadi sect followed by many within the country's Amazigh minority.

Allowed to flourish during the Qaddafi era as a bulwark against Islamists, Madkhali clerics opposed the 2011 uprising. New opportunities arose for the Madkhali current to assert itself after the civil conflict erupted in 2014. In eastern Libya many Madkhalis joined Haftar's operation – often encouraged by specific fatwas issued by Saudi Sheikh Rabi al-Madkhali himself[9],[10] – and they became crucial to his fighting forces. Empowered as a result, Madkhali clerics now dominate the eastern Dar el-Ifta (*fatwa11* office) and *awqaf* or religious endowments ministry.

In western Libya, the UN-backed GNA government relied on armed groups dominated by the Madkhalis for its security,

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[8] Interim report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011) concerning Libya, 2018 (not publicly available).

[9] "Rabiaa Al Madkhali Calls For a Salafi Revolution Against 'Muslim Brotherhood' in Libya", Al Araby 21, 8 July 2016, https://bit.ly/2CDyzc2

[10] Followers of Madkhali Salafism follow Sheikh Rabi al-Madkhali who is based in Saudi Arabia. In the 1990s, the Saudi Arabian government promoted this branch of Salafism to "discredit the popular, Muslim Brotherhood-infused Salafi Sahwa (or Awakening) Movement", according to F. Wehrey in "Quiet No More?", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 13 October 2016.

[11] A *fatwa* is a religious legal decree or opinion issued by a recognized leader.

most notably the Special Deterrence Force (commonly known as Rada) led by Abdulrauf Kara. At present, Libya's Madkhali current is estimated to be the largest Salafist stream in the country, with tens of thousands of followers. Madkhalis reject democracy as contrary to Islam, and their clerics in Libya regularly preach against it. Some Libyans suspect Madkhalis are a "Trojan horse" for Saudi influence in the country and their rise has worried many within Libya's still fragmented security infrastructure. Some consider Madkhalism a key challenge – and even a threat – to the country's stabilization.

Conclusion

Unlike Tunisia and Egypt, where Islamist parties swept to electoral victory in the immediate post-2011 period, mainstream Islamists in Libya did not fare well in the ballots that followed Qaddhafi's fall. Despite this, savvy alliance-building – whether politically or with powerful armed factions – meant they were able to project influence within different spheres during the early transitional period. Since the civil conflict erupted in mid-2014, however, the political influence of Libya's mainstream Islamists has declined. Movements like the Muslim Brotherhood are struggling to reinvent themselves in a society where hostility to such groups – already historically high – has grown, and where many conflate them with more radical elements. For now, involvement in the UN-led political process has allowed the Brotherhood and a number of non-aligned mainstream Islamists to maintain some relevance. Additionally, their links to various armed factions means they also retain some influence on the ground, particularly in western Libya.

When the UN-mediated dialogue process eventually gives way to electoral politics, Libya's mainstream Islamists will again be faced with the ballot box. How they respond to this, and the process of integrating allied armed groups into an envisaged unified security infrastructure, will determine much about their future role in Libya. In addition, they will have to navigate the

challenges posed not only by jihadist groups, such as IS and those affiliated or inspired by al-Qaeda, but also the increasingly assertive Madkhali Salafists. Libya's mainstream Islamists could well find themselves eclipsed by the more numerous ultra-conservative Madkhalis, whose Saudi-inspired animus toward democracy and pluralism presents a significant threat to any revived democratic transition.

9. Egyptian Islamists in the Labyrinth

Ashraf El Sherif

One can say that post-2011 events in Egypt have invalidated the "democratization-inclusion theory", which is the argument that Islamist movements – if included within a democratic system – will moderate and democratize their ideology and behavior. One can also argue that current events will equally invalidate the "de-Islamization by force" argument, which is the notion of eliminating Islamists by force to achieve Islam-free politics. Ironically, the 2013 coup in Egypt and the subsequent crackdown on the Islamists both dealt a lethal blow to the Islamists' dreams of an "Islamist electocracy" (i.e., the obsession with elections as the sole means of Islamist success) and furnished the Islamist movement with a new historical narrative of victimhood and the hopes of future redemption. Political beliefs and orientations are fluid and taking on a generational character. Islamist populism, nascent since the 2011 revolution, is sweeping the Islamist field alongside soul-searching and confusion about the future.

The Rabaa generation of Islamist politics is still coming of age[1]. Deep scars exist on both the regime and Islamist sides. Legacies

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[1] The reference here is to the regime's deadly dispersal of the fifty-day long sit-sin in Rabaa al-Adaweya Square in east Cairo on 14 August 2013. Islamists were protesting the ouster of Mohamed Morsi, who had been elected in 2012. The crackdown by the regime left more than 800 protestors dead and about sixty dead from the police and the army. Human Rights Watch described it as: "one of the world's largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history" in "All According to Plan: The Rab'a Massacre and Mass Killings of Protesters in Egypt", Human Rights Watch, 12 April 2014.

of hatred, vengeance, and uncompromising attitudes will not be easily healed, and the full impact of this discord will only be felt in the years to come. Even if the Muslim Brotherhood manages to survive, its ability to maintain unity of purpose and control over its ranks is becoming increasingly questionable. Possibilities for the rise of "democratic Islamists", whether from within the Brotherhood or from outside, are limited as ever before. Egypt might be witnessing the creation of a new epoch of political Islam in the face of very unpredictable events.

Islamists in Post-2011 Egypt: Their Challenges and Failures

Egyptian Islamists faced twin challenges in the wake of the 2011 uprising that ousted former President Hosni Mubarak after nearly thirty years in power. The first was ideological and revolved around defining and structuring the religion-state relationship in a creative way consistent with claims of Islamist authenticity. The second was political: how to develop a feasible political vision containing a clear Islamist bias that also kept in mind the national interest and the vision of the 2011 revolution. The Islamists overcame neither of these challenges.

Importantly, the Muslim Brotherhood made it into power after 2011 not because of an ideological triumph that won the hearts and minds of the people but through political horse trading and other calculated political tactics that initially went in their favor but eventually led to their ouster. The Brotherhood was not the Egyptian Muslim version of the European Christian democratic parties whether in terms of ideology or organization. In other words, it failed to situate itself comfortably somewhere between the nationalist, conservative, liberal, leftist, and religious Salafist traditions, as some of the "reformist" Brotherhood leaders hoped the group could represent. The Brotherhood was in power from 2011 to 2013 yet could not lead a wide-ranging process of democratic transition, did not relate to all the diverse communities present in Egyptian society, and could not understand the

structural characteristics of the crisis in Egypt and the concomitant need for a new polity with different state-society relations as well as reforms to the political economy and its institutions. With a bizarrely simplistic outlook, and most importantly, a lack of access to information about how the state runs the country, the Brotherhood could neither marshal the necessary human resources nor develop nationwide networks and knowledge about state bureaucracy, institutions, and the economy.

Conflict between the Brotherhood and the deep state was very likely from the beginning due to historical rivalries and modern-day incompatibilities. During its brief time in power, the Brotherhood moved from a futile policy of assuaging the organs of the former regime to an even more futile policy of conflict with state institutions and networks of the former regime. State institutions loathed the peculiar character of the Brotherhood with its exclusionary ideology, lack of transparency, cult-like aspects, outsider status, and prioritization of the organization's existence above all else. The state also saw its regional and international extensions as a "state within the state" that acted against the interests of Egypt and its self-proclaimed guardian institutions. Nonetheless, the deep state opted for tactical cooperation with the Islamists during the 2011 to 2013 transitional period to neutralize the radical revolutionary mood and apply conservative brakes to the transition process. This decision yielded tremendous dividends for the deep state. After the radical winds of the uprising subsided – and after the Brotherhood made enemies of the revolutionary protest movements and lost the support of average voters thanks to their political and economic failures and eccentric discourse – it was much easier for the deep state to strike back at the isolated, unpopular Brotherhood.

The Brotherhood After the 2013 Coup and Rabaa Square

Does the ouster of former President Mohamed Morsi and the 2013 Rabaa Square massacre signify the end of the Brotherhood?

Yes and no. Of course, Islamist movements (the Brotherhood included) will remain key political actors that have an ideologically committed social constituency and decades' worth of social and cultural capital that would translate into electoral weight in any real contest. However, one can also comfortably assert that the pursuit of an Islamist hegemony, or normalizing Islamist ideology that eventually dictates the rules of the public sphere, has been definitively halted by state repression and societal rejection. Furthermore, recent events in Egypt also challenged the utopian belief that Islam is the solution. Complicated political and economic problems are irreducible to facile slogans and political beliefs infused with religion. Islamists themselves have reached such a conclusion, as indicated by writings of Brotherhood members and officials[2]. The real question now is what form the Islamist presence in the new Egypt will take both at this pseudo-fascist authoritarian phase under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's military regime or during a potential opening after Sisi – if it ever happens. It is probable that Egyptian political Islam will shift into a more fluid space occupied by medium and small-sized Islamist actors rather than the large organizational role it once enjoyed.

Despite its significant losses, the Brotherhood has proven to be more robust than presumed. Its durable organization and the undeniable commitment of its popular base have proven to be valuable assets. Nonetheless, it has also been afflicted by stagnation in its leadership, organization, and ideology. Indeed, the Brotherhood lost its *raison d'être* as a force for change. The Brotherhood, so far, is still fixated on the idea of recreating the 2011 revolution, albeit with more Islamized substance. This Islamization of the Brotherhood anti-regime protest activities is seriously ill-advised as it comes at a juncture when societal

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[2] A. Darrag, "The Muslim Brotherhood Revisions: From Preaching to Partisan," *Egyptian Institute for Studies,* 19 March 2016; "Muslim Brotherhood Announces the Results of Their Assessments from January 2011 to January 2017: A Statement", 19 March 2017, *Ikhwan Online*; "Publishing the Second Part of the Revisions of the Muslim Brotherhood Youth Leadership", *Islamion,* 29 April 2017.

support for Islamists is at its lowest and the level of alienation of Islamists from society is unprecedented historically.

Subjected in 2013 to the most severe blows in its history, initially the Brotherhood managed to maintain the minimal cohesion necessary for a resurrection whenever conditions change. For example, it preserved a bare bones command structure as well as its sources of funding[3]. This was achieved due to the Brotherhood's trademark flexibility, which is achieved with its centralized decision-making, decentralization in implementation at the local levels, and its ability to replenish its cadre of followers. However, this survival tactic has looked less promising since 2015 with the fading of anti-coup protests under the full power of the regime's repression and internal rivalries within the group.

More gravely, the Brotherhood lost its ideological impetus for existence. For decades, the Brotherhood claimed a centrist position of mediation between Islam and modernity and an appealing *manhaj*, or doctrine, for socio-political reform. This methodology built on the themes of the school of Islamic reformism – such as gradualism and moderation – and resulted in the formation of a strong organization that recruited members on a partisan basis, albeit loosely enough on the ideological front to include different viewpoints. The major target of the Brotherhood was to establish a *de-facto* sub-society that infiltrated the population yet was still conservative enough to reject assimilation with its surroundings. This was translated into significant electoral capital[4]. The Brotherhood's progress in this pursuit has suffered its most debilitating setback in its almost century-long history. This setback is due not just to the state's clampdown but also societal rejection (by both elites and commoners). Equally important, the Brotherhood lost its credibility in the eyes of its Islamist audience for the simple reason that it could not deliver on its promises and even failed to defend itself from the impending coup.

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[3] Author interviews with Muslim Brotherhood members, 2018.

[4] T. Masoud, *Counting Islam: Religion, Class and Elections in Egypt*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Future Paths for the Brotherhood

Now, in the twilight of its eclipse, the Brotherhood faces three options:

1. *Hibernation and Fragmentation*

In this scenario, the Brotherhood might take up apolitical underground social and proselytizing activities, or we might see a post-Brotherhood condition whereby the group's grassroots adherents take on similar activities until conditions become suitable for re-establishing the organization with a new political mission, a revised ideology, and probably a new structure.

2. *The Politics of Pragmatic Adaptation*

In this scenario, the Brotherhood awaits time for reconciliation with the regime whenever conditions are ripe for this – for instance, if the regime weakens due to its inability to address significant economic and political crises as well as due to external pressure from regional donors. Needless to say, a precondition for such a prospect is the disappearance of General Sisi and his entourage from the picture. This precondition is theoretically possible but not to be expected in the short term, particularly as the regime is still legitimizing itself in terms of its zero-sum confrontation with the Islamists.

The old guard of the Brotherhood apparently favors this option of waiting for reconciliation. For example, it recently put forth an initiative aimed at resolving the conflict with the regime[5]. However, apparently, it fails to understand that any reconciliation with the regime would be on stricter terms than those of the Mubarak era. The regime would eschew the Mubarak era's approach, seen as too lenient and as enabling the Brotherhood to develop significant social capital and political gains. The new terms for the Brotherhood's re-integration into the political realm would likely include: a lower ceiling of seats available to

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[5] "A Statement for the Muslim Brotherhood at the Fifth Anniversary of Rabaa", Muslim Brotherhood Media Spokesperson, 13 August 2018.

them in parliament; a ban on running for a position of executive power (i.e., the presidency); submission to the regime's discourse on national identity; respect for state institutions, minorities, and women's rights, according to the regime's discourse; and acceptance of the state as representative of true Islam. The necessary rhetorical and doctrinal concessions would reduce the Brotherhood to an ordinary conservative actor with constrained ability to effect political change or to maintain its ideological identity.

3. Waiting for a Total Revolution

In this scenario, the Brotherhood stays at the margins of society as a revolutionary actor and joins ranks with the amorphous mass of "revolutionary Islamists," who have arrived on the scene since the 2011 uprising branding themselves as truly Islamist and truly revolutionary[6].

These revolutionary Islamists did not consider the Brotherhood-affiliated President Mohamed Morsi – elected in 2012 and ousted in 2013 – as an Islamist ruler from the beginning as he did not put *sharia* or the Islamist project of creating an Islamic state into action. Despite these shortcomings in the eyes of the revolutionary Islamists, Morsi's rule was certainly far more tolerant of Islamists. For this reason, the revolutionary Islamists oppose the 2013 military coup, and the Rabaa

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[6] Since 2011, these groups included: the Salafist Front; the Free People (*Ahrar*) movement; the General Islamic Coalition al-Sharia students' movement; the New Islam movement; the Salafist Youth coalition; the Salah al-Din grandsons; the Revolutionaries without a Current (*Thowar bila Tayar*); the Revolutionary Salafists (*Salafiyoon Thawriyoon*); Our nation (*Ummatona*); the Shar'i association for rights and freedoms, interested in creating a non-partisan clerical framework of reference; the Coalition for the Support of the Converts to Islam; the Costa Salafists, calling for an open-minded Salafism and conciliation between different revolutionary political movements; the al-Nahda and reform group, which champions a discourse of social justice, anti-capitalist hegemony, and anti-US imperialism, and reproduces some of Sayyid Qutb's teachings; and finally, the Hazemoon and Lazem Hazem, both groups comprise the supporters of the ex-presidential hopeful Sheikh Hazem Salah Abu-Ismail and are avowedly confrontational, departing from al-Nour party's conservatism.

massacre in August 2013 solidified their narrative. The revolutionary Islamists advocate a new political system and are waiting for a revolutionary overhaul of the *status quo* that would shatter the existing political modalities.

How Revolutionary Islamists Differ from the Brotherhood

The revolutionary Islamists frame the more conservative Islamic political movements (such as the Brotherhood and the Salafist al-Nour party) as Islamist sell-outs that traded their principles for power. They engage with the anti-Sisi Islamists and are active in public protests as well as cyberspace activism. Demographics play an important role in the growth of revolutionary Islamists. The over-representation of youth within the ranks of these groups intensified their revolutionary mood that refused to tolerate the incremental Brotherhood and al-Nour politics.

Importantly, they remained indecisive about their course of action both after the 2011 uprising and the 2013 coup. At the party level, there were attempts at party formation between July 2011 and March 2013, but none solidified into an electorally powerful force. On the question of state-religion relations, they critique democracy as a harmful Western product but are not opposed to using some of its mechanisms. Their lack of funds, organizational skills, political action, and administrative experience was a serious handicap. Their shortage in developing a body of intellectual work to inform their ideology and policy proposals was also crippling. Unlike classic Salafist groups, the new revolutionary Islamist groups do not rely primarily on mosques for outreach and recruitment, instead relying on personal outreach, political propaganda, and online tactics. Furthermore, they can conduct these efforts without backing from the clerics. This renders them more innovative but denies them useful resources. The advantage to this new approach is that marginalized recruits with socio-economic, political, and cultural grievances can be brought into the fold. The disadvantage is that such recruits might dilute the pious and ideologically correct nature of the adherents, which is an important source of social capital among the Islamists, who are typically

concerned about religious rigor and correctness. In general, and apart from their operative goals, these revolutionary Islamists still lack a clear and consistent doctrine. This explains their confused wavering between revolutionary political discourse and the conventional Salafist Islamist discourse, and between the politics of democratic mass uprising and that of armed mass insurgency.

Ideology of the Revolutionary Islamists

The revolutionary Islamists see Morsi's ouster as proof that Islamist participation in democratic politics leads nowhere. To make matters worse, they believe Morsi's overthrow was part of an American-led attack against Islam. Between 2013 and 2015, Islamist anger was not only prevalent in the streets, but also on social media. It is clear that the mainstream Islamists' discourse is shifting in scope and objectives: instead of reforming the state from within, the goal now is to dismantle the state's institutions and the rules of the game. The conflict is increasingly depicted in exclusively ideological terms, rather than political ones, polarizing the sides into a dichotomy of righteous believers versus non-believers backed by anti-Islamic regional and international powers. The dichotomy that is emerging is narrowing any middle ground and reconciliation is effectively off the table.

Goals of the Revolutionary Islamists

The revolutionary Islamists believe they should seize the opportunity to radically re-make the state rather than follow in the footsteps of previous Islamist groups who decided to cooperate with the existing state institutions. Furthermore, they no longer firmly renounce violence. "Peaceful protest activism" remains the official political line but is merely a fig-leaf that barely conceals the violent potentials of these groups. Vocabulary that used to be unique to peripheral jihadist movements has recently found a place in the rhetoric of young radicalized Islamists[7].

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[7] An online document circulated by a group of young Muslim Brothers titled "The First Issue" discussed "Dafi al-Sael" and rules for fighting "al-Taefa al

Lessons Learned

The 2013 Rabaa Square sit-in was both a success and a failure. It failed to attract non-Islamist supporters of a broader democratic discourse who were present during the 2011 Tahrir Square protest and who are necessary to mount any effective challenge to the military regime. Nevertheless, Rabaa Square did succeed in ushering in a new era in Islamist history. The ideological sit-in proved to be instrumental to the post-coup Islamist soul-searching in Egypt because it resulted in the creation of a narrative that the Islamists used to define themselves. On the other hand, it also confirmed the Islamists' self-isolation from the rest of society. The Islamists view the events of 2013 and the aftermath as an evil conspiracy that betrayed both the Islamist and the 2011 revolution causes. Their interest in mobilizing against the regime is an entirely self-serving attempt to regain the ground they lost. Indeed, their rhetoric does not prioritize the suffering of the Egyptian people at the hands of the regime's political and economic policies, which is arguably a far more important issue to the populace than the treatment of the Brotherhood or the illegitimacy of the Morsi ouster and the violent halt to the 2011 to 2013 democratic transition.

Many youth members of Islamist groups are currently questioning the benefits of Islamist organizations, criticizing their lack of inclusivity, representation, and efficacy. While they concede the practical necessity of organized collective action, they warn against partisan identities, internal divisions, and fanaticism that plague segments of the Islamist movement.

Until their desired revolutionary Islamist group is established, Islamist youth have no option but to support the Brotherhood in its current war with the regime. Indeed, their plans for radical protests require a strong and hierarchical organization,

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Momtanea." This terminology was prevalent in jihadist literature from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, and it justifies jihad against ruling regimes and elites who refrain from applying Sharia or inflict damage on the lives, freedoms, and property of the pious in the Muslim countries. This terminology was never present in Brotherhood literature previously.

which only the Brotherhood offers. However, though the radical youth may need the Brotherhood's networks to organize, this does not diminish their contempt for what they see as the Brotherhood's naïve and pointless strategy of peaceful dissent and modest political objectives.

Disagreement Over Violent and Non-Violent Approaches Among Islamists

Still, the utility of bringing about violent revolution is debatable. Politically – and apart from the question of logistical preparedness – such violence might nurture divisions and social hostilities against the backdrop of popular indifference to the regime's violent crackdown on the Islamists. This potential outcome is the reason why the Brotherhood, and other Islamists for this matter, is disinclined to unequivocally support violence. The Syrian model of grassroots insurgency is not importable to Egypt due to popular reluctance and a lack of comparable sectarian and demographic factors.

For these reasons, the best option, the youth believe, is a "semi-violent" revolutionary struggle that would target the underbelly of the regime and the deep state's interests in the political sphere, the army, the judiciary, the business realm, and the media. Aware of popular reluctance to endorse its destabilizing violent tactics, these Islamists look for a small but more ideologically solid and consistent base that is passionate about their cause and the regime's sweeping repression of the Islamists.

The establishment of new Islamist organizations reflecting these viewpoints has been reported, but it is difficult to verify the size and composition of their membership[8]. These small groups have not emphasized the restoration of Morsi as a central goal. Their activities – mostly low-intensity hit-and-run violence aimed at vengeance and regime destabilization – are distinct from jihadist violence in the Sinai Peninsula, where organized groups

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[8] Such groups include Ajnad Misr, the "Set Fire" movement, Resistance Brigades, the Molotov Movement, the Execution Movement, and others.

such as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (Wilayet Sinai) share some of their ideological viewpoints but espouse a grand strategy of political insurgency aimed at vacating the ground in Sinai for an alternative Islamist government. Apparently, jihadists' organizational structures became totally disconnected with the Brotherhood's activism after some ambiguous overlap at the beginning. Their activities seemingly diminished over the last two years. However, the decline could be due to the regime's successful suppression attempts rather than a decline in their ideological appeal.

Intra-Brotherhood Rivalries

Much has been reported on internal rivalries within the Brotherhood from 2014 to 2016. In truth, the conflict was less generational than was argued initially. Rather, the argument circulated the disagreements regarding in tactics, style of operations, and organizational factionalism. The two biggest factions in confrontation were contesting the tactical differences regarding violence versus non-violence, the efficacy and integrity of controversial group leadership, and the scope and intensity of political opposition and its real targets as described above. The critical faction – in favor of lying in wait for conditions to ripen for a revolution and the need for new leadership in place of the old failed and despised one – accepted the need to join forces with the revolutionary Islamists, believing that they could restrain those with excessively violent tendencies thanks to their superior organization. However, the government's repressive crackdown and the old guard of the Brotherhood's command of financial resources rendered the critical faction isolated, miniscule, and forced into de-facto oblivion. Motivated by their stakes in electoral participation built over decades, the Brotherhood can still reproduce a commitment to electoral democracy among its members, provided that conditions for free and fair elections exist. However, the existence of unruly populist revolutionary Islamists to the right of the incumbent Brotherhood organization might jeopardize the classical Brotherhood discursive domination over the Islamist field in Egypt.

Salafists in Post-2011 Egypt

Salafists are among the biggest political losers in post-2011 Egypt. Their main losses are the erosion of their hegemony over the religious sphere and the declining appeal of their particular brand of religious and social reform based on theological purification and reforming society accordingly.

Before 2011, Salafist ideas and methods of religious thought acquired a hegemonic position in religious visual and online media in terms of viewership and ratings – due to the regime's relative tolerance and the favorable regional context, among other factors[9]. Salafist televangelists became the predominant archetype of popular religious proselytizers in Egypt and even in the rest of the Arab countries. Even traditional institutions of religious learning and education who used to have their own methods, such as al-Azhar, have been infiltrated by Salafist thought, teachers, and students. In such a context, it is unsurprising (given the Brotherhood's history of ideological inclusiveness) that Salafist thought made significant inroads within the Brotherhood organization, in a process of what Hossam Tamam once described as the "Salafization of the Muslim Brotherhood"[10].

Their biggest feat during the decades preceding 2011 was to establish on the one hand an indisputable linkage between the literalist and scripturalist school in Islamic theological and jurisprudential heritage (*turath*), and on the other hand their own methods of change that made a cultural, behavioral, social,

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[9] Salafists were seen as apolitical, safe alternatives to the politicized Islamists. Salafism is among the anchors of Saudi Arabian domestic and foreign institutional and religious politics. See S. Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia,* Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2011; R. Meijer, *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement,* New York, NY, Columbia University Press, 2009.

[10] H. Tamam, "Ta'akol al-Otrouha al-Ikhwaneya wa so'oud al-Salafeya dakhel Gama'at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen (The Degeneration of the Brotherhood Hypothesis and the Ascendancy of Salafism within the Muslim Brotherhood Group)", *Marased*, Futuristic Studies Unit, Alexandria Bibliotheca, Egypt, 2010.

and psychological impact[11]. This linkage has been dethroned because of the Salafists' political miscalculations, intellectual irrelevance, ideological inconsistency, and unscrupulous missteps following the year 2011[12].

The clear outcome of this ideological domination Salafists had prior to 2011 became clear after the 2011 revolution when the Salafists, whether as independent al-Nour party members or as affiliates of the Brotherhood, were influential enough to force their ideological conservatism on the Islamist platform during the 2011 to 2013 deliberations on the new constitution and political system as well as national debates on identity, freedoms, and rights. The Brotherhood was cornered and compelled into more conservative positions[13]. If it had resisted the Salafists' pressure to adopt these positions, the Brotherhood's Islamic correctness would be tarnished in the eyes of the Islamist street.

Although the Salafists were strong and effective at pressuring the Brotherhood to adopt key positions, they had their own problems as well. For example, the disappearance of major Salafist points of reference from the party's platform due to institutional factionalism, personality conflicts, and an inability to deflect the serious critiques raised by the liberal secularists and other religious contenders – such as neo-Sufists, Islamist democrats, Azhar-affiliated and independent Asharites, and Muslim modernizers – weakened the movement's ability to maintain such an identification of the glorified heritage with their actual methods and practice[14].

Post-2011, Salafist politics were clearly a liability to both the Islamist and the democratic cause. Their uncompromising maximalist stance on the question of application of sharia

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[11] Ibid.

[12] A. El Sherif, "Egypt's Salafists at a Crossroads", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 29 April 2015.

[13] S. Brooke, "Egypt", in S. Hamid and W. McCants (eds.), *Rethinking Political Islam,* Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 18.

[14] A. Salem, "Ikhtelaf al-Islamiyeen (Differences of Islamists)", Namaa Center for Research and Studies, 2012.

(both in constitutional and parliamentary deliberations and as an item of political street mobilization and media propaganda) wreaked havoc on the unity of the opposition. Consensus on rules of the new political games became unreachable, and a resultant obsession with identity politics polarized the political spectrum[15]. Key social elites and significant popular segments became seriously concerned about the danger of the Salafists' potential impact on private freedoms, life-style, and national stability. Also, their sectarian diatribes (both against non-Muslims and non-Salafist Muslims) and the idiosyncrasies of their clerics and politicians in parliament, the media, and the public sphere added more fuel to the fire[16].

The Brotherhood, at one point in time, had to choose between siding with the secularist liberal and nationalist ex-partners in the pre-2011 opposition or siding with the Salafists. It chose the latter[17]. This was tactically reasonable as the Brotherhood feared Salafist competition and was interested in a partnership with them given the popularity of the Salafist ideology among the religious masses (even within the Brotherhood rank and file itself) and the mass of Salafist supporters, whose voting power the Brotherhood wanted. However, the partnership was strategically disastrous because it rendered the Brothers totally incapable of facilitating a successful democratic transition, thus losing the trust of even people who used to give them the benefit of the doubt. The military and state institutions – which never really relinquished their position of "ruling but not governing"[18] during the 2011 to 2013 transitional period – took

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[15] M. Dunne and A. Hamzawy, "Egypt's Secular Political Parties: A Struggle for Identity and Independence", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 31 March 2017.

[16] Some of them were purposefully exaggerated and even fabricated by their non-Islamist opponents. Yet, there are always elements of truth in it in the eyes of people.

[17] A. El Sherif, "The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Failures", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1 July 2014.

[18] S. Cook, "Ruling but not governing: The Military and political development in Egypt, Algeria and Turkey", Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press,

advantage of the chaotic Muslim Brotherhood rule and posed as the only possible guardians of the nation against the threat of social conflict and destabilization. In the eyes of the frightened and exhausted people and elites – and weary of both Islamist threats (real or imagined) and the infant democracy that looked chaotic and unpromising – the military's offer to rescue the situation and become both the ruling and governing authority seemed appealing.

The influence of Salafis also waned. Regional and international support for Salafists dried up due to different policy priorities among the new ruling elites, particularly in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (where Salafists used to be seen as a legitimizing or disciplinary force but are now seen as facilitators of radical extremism and instability)[19]. Losing favor with these external supporters was central to the Salafists' declining fortunes since they lack an independent economic, political, and organizational powerbase like the Brotherhood enjoys. Salafists in Egypt were divided and took different sides in the post-2013 confrontation between the regime and the Brotherhood. These internal splits produced an unprecedented climate of feuds, diatribes, and scores to settle. While these divisions are a severe handicap, the Salafists also face the grave need for ideological revision to make up for lost social capital. Because of their chosen path, Salafists will have to adopt new methods and/or a new doctrine altogether.

Despite current eye-catching activism in the Sinai Peninsula and the Western desert[20], the Salafi-jihadi doctrine of change through combat has lost its historical appeal. The factors contributing to this shift include: societal rejection and the loss

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2007. Cook tried to explain the tactics of the military in maintaining its dominance over key decisions from behind the curtains of civilian charades of limited democratic openings in those countries.

[19] S. Lacroix (2011).

[20] M. Awad and M. Hashem, "Egypt's escalating Islamic insurgency", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015.

of popular constituencies[21]; the decisive rejection of jihadist ideas by major clerics and religious institutions after decades of ambivalence[22],[23],[24]; and the use of jihadism by the Islamic State (IS) as terrifying nihilism that produced nothing but destructive chaos and civil wars[25]. Because of the combined force of these factors, jihadism lost the credibility it had until the end of the 1990s as a potential force for social and political change among many people. Certainly, jihadists survive but as marginal actors that thrive only in a failed state situation, military conflict zones, outright Sunni-Shia sectarian confrontations, and marginalized and troubled unassimilated Muslim minority communities in Europe. Jihadists, particularly the most recent variants, are also uncontrollable by anyone, including other Islamists themselves. The role of jihadists is now relegated only to that of persistent trouble-maker and de-stabilizer but not serious contenders for power and government positions. This runs against the whole *raison d'être* of Islamism as the "solution" for the future in the eyes of the Muslim masses.

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[21] The jihadists' share of protest votes against the unpopularity of both domestic governments and Western policies have significantly diminished.

[22] There were a series of fatwas by the Supreme Council of Clerics in Saudi Arabia condemning Islamist terrorism and jihadism as practiced by groups such as al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and others: Kingdome of Saudi Arabia, "General Presidency for Scientific Research and Fatwa Decision No. 239: Fatwa and Financing Terrorism", 12 April 2010; "Summary of Decisions and Statements about Takfir by the Supreme Religious Scholars in Saudi Arabia", Assakina, 2016.

[23] T. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islam since 1979*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 16-83.

[24] The rejection of jihadist ideas was not only due to the regime's changed priorities but also partly thanks to the new jihadist generation's defiance of the patriarchy of those clerics.

[25] Such destruction and violence were the original sins in the Salafist doctrine and were to be avoided at all Costs. See B. Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action", in R. Meijer (ed.) (2009); Fahmy Jud'an, "al-Salafiyya: Huduha wa Tahowlateha (Salafism: Its limitations and transformations)", A*'lam al-Fikr Journal*, no. 3-4, April-June 1998.

Conclusion

Whether or not political Islam will ever again appeal to broader segments of Egyptian society with their yearning for an inclusive and egalitarian polity will be determined first by the future political situation in Egypt and second by the choices Islamist leaders make. Neither factor looks promising at this point. Under Sisi, Egypt's ongoing structural crises of governance and political economy are getting worse in quantity and degree. The political sphere has devolved into a surreal caricature and civil society is non-existent. Anger, frustration, and the absence of channels for intellectual and political expression might be contributing to the growth of the opposition. Nonetheless, most probably, public apathy, a political vacuum, and passive resignation will reign for a long time. Political mobility requires hope, not frustration.

As for the Islamists, the Brotherhood still approaches its current crisis as a survival test and fails to see it for what it really is: a historical juncture that requires the creation of a new age of Islamist politics or even post-Islamist politics. To make matters more complicated, revolutionary Islamists, still hoping for a utopian moment of revolution, tend to bypass politics. Politics, understood as the articulation of popular interests, requires constituency-building and adequate organization, discourse, platforms, and leadership, which the radical Islamists lack. Their promise to replace the Brotherhood's model of mobilizing people as political consumers with a new one that would install people as political participants is yet to be delivered, if it ever happens, not to mention their commitment to democracy, which barely exists. The lack of commitment to democracy extends wide and deep among most, if not all, of the political actors in the country which makes the crisis in Egypt intractable.

10. Political Islam in Jordan: A Plurality of Visions

Paolo Maggiolini

Political Islam in Jordan today needs to be reconsidered according to a twofold perspective that considers the Hashemite monarchy's traditional approach to the state-religion relationship since the Kingdom's independence in 1946 as well as Jordan's complex geopolitical position that has imposed on both the Crown and Jordanian Islamists a recurring tug-of-war between domestic and regional imperatives.

Unlike in most Middle Eastern states, the Jordanian political system was established not in competition with the religious sphere and actors but by bureaucratizing and co-opting them[1]. In this framework, the Hashemite mechanism of control has created a sort of blocked pluralist system aimed at encompassing all the competing groups in Jordanian society[2]. The regime's mechanism of control is not hegemonic and immanent, but pervasive and cogent. Since the 1970s, the political re-appropriation and re-interpretation of Muslim identity (namely political Islam) has developed through the intertwining of three different spheres: the Hashemite state, Jordan's Muslim

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[1] Q. Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan*, Albany, New York, SUNY Press, 2001, pp. 2-9.

[2] M. Moaddel, *Jordanian Exceptionalism: A Comparative Analysis of State-Religion Relationships in Egypt, Iran, Jordan, and Syria*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 5; R. Lucas, *Institutions and the Politics of Survival in Jordan: Domestic Responses to External Challenges, 1988-2001*, Albany, New York, SUNY Press, 2012, pp. 7-8.

Brotherhood, and the Salafists. This has made the Jordanian political Islam scene multi-vocal and manifold. Political Islam in Jordan consists of state and non-state actors interacting on the basis of a different distribution of power; moreover, distinct ideologies, strategies, and tactics are used by the various actors. Jordan's political Islam can be understood as a complex network of relationships, with the regime performing the role of arbiter, leading actor, and a pivotal point of reference around which develops a complex intra- and inter-dialectic that cuts across the major groups working in this field.

It is therefore not surprising that the recent Arab upheavals and the Syrian civil war have triggered a new phase of reconfiguration and transformation of Jordan's political Islam. The regime has committed to quelling the most radical expressions of Islamist militancy and to isolating the most uncompromising. At the same time, it has sought to co-opt diverse expressions of Jordan's political Islam (both radical and moderate) in an attempt to defend its legitimacy, stabilize the country, and preserve its image of an open and pluralist political system. Similarly, Jordan's political Islam and its diverse voices have contended with this period of turmoil and transformation. Each sphere has been internally divided on what posture and approach should have been taken in Jordanian politics as well as regarding the most important events and crises developing within the region.

Nevertheless, the results of the regime's counterterrorism strategy and its divide-and-rule policies have been uneven. On the one hand, the regime has been successful in reorienting the domestic position of a sizeable component of Jordan's political Islam, pushing them to publicly confirm their willingness to operate within the borders and red lines of the Hashemite political system. On the other hand, political Islam in Jordan today appears much more fragmented and internally divided than it was before the Arab upheavals. This segmentation has grown not only according to the divide that separates Islamist

centrists, the Brotherhood[3], and Salafists, but indeed has become present within these groups. It has created a complex puzzle of contrasting positions outside the traditional dialectic separating them. Especially in the case of the latter two dimensions, such a fragmentation seems to go beyond the ideological distinction between doves versus hardliners or apolitical versus political. Divisions and fractures are overlapping, with the risk of further exacerbating their political conflict. Nevertheless, the current fragmentation is more nuanced than simply mirroring and reproducing such a divide. It is also reshaping and muddling the logic and positioning within each sphere of Jordan's political Islam.

Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood and the Hashemite Divide-and-Rule Policies

Since its founding in the 1940s, the Brotherhood has developed a sort of symbiotic relationship with the Hashemite state and regime[4]. Such a productive "cohabitation" further developed during the 1970s and the 1980s when Jordanian parliamentary life was suspended and political parties were outlawed with the exception of the Brotherhood that was left free to work and develop within the country. The imposition of martial law left the regime free to assign posts and positions within the Jordanian economy and political field. Cadres and leaders of the Brotherhood become better integrated into the system. It was during this period that the Brotherhood became a grass-roots movement and a well-structured charitable association active both in the field of education and in professional associations. Then, starting in the mid-1980s, a new generation of activists (predominantly of Palestinian origin) began to make headway

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[3] "The Brotherhood" in this paper will refer to the organization in Jordan, unless otherwise specified.

[4] M. Boulby, *The Muslim Brotherhood and the Kings of Jordan, 1945-1993*, vol. 18, University of South Florida, 1999, pp. 1-2.

within the association, supporting a more vocal and uncompromising approach. It was during this decade that the divide between doves and hawks (as the ideological distinction between pragmatists and purists is usually portrayed) began to appear.

In this framework, 1989 was an important turning point. While in the short term the regime's decision to hold new parliamentary elections was perceived as a blessing by the Brotherhood, in the medium term, this new political situation presented the Brotherhood with a number of unexpected challenges. On the one hand, participation required the Brotherhood to compromise and rationalize its message in order to comply with election rules. On the other, the regime's mechanism of control became more cogent, in particular after the Brotherhood's electoral victory in 1989 and its first government experience through 1991. From 1992 to 1993, the regime changed the electoral law (introducing the single, non-transferable vote system) with the implicit aim of manipulating and underrepresenting the Brotherhood constituency and imposing on it the principle of administrative distinction by means of a new law on political parties[5]. While opposition to this electoral system remained until recently a major bone of contention between the Brotherhood and the regime, the formation of the Islamic Action Front (IAF) party formally showed the Brotherhood's readiness to conform to the new political conditions in the Kingdom. The IAF was created by the Brotherhood to unify Jordan's political Islam and to guide it during the elections and in parliamentary life. In this way, the association would have continued to focus on *dawa* (proselytization) and charitable activity without the need to compromise with the rules of politics. In 1994, the Brotherhood Secretary-General, Abd al-Majid Dhunaybat, declared that the Brotherhood would operate in Jordan according to pragmatism, law, and participation[6].

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[5] M. Moaddel (2002), pp. 125-126; R. Lucas (2012), p. 38.
[6] L. Tal, "Dealing with Radical Islam: The Case of Jordan", *Survival,* vol. 37, no. 3, 1995, p. 140.

Nevertheless, this systematization encountered its first setback during the 1997 parliamentary elections[7]. The association entered the electoral campaign while undergoing a bitter internal dispute between those supporting the advantage of participating and a growing component vocally calling for boycotting the elections. The period of reforms from 1992 to 1997 reforms, the signing of the peace treaty with Israel (1994), the riots over bread (1996), the so-called "war of the mosques," and a new law imposing state control over sermons both worsened the relationship between the regime and the Brotherhood and widened the divide between doves and hawks. Ultimately, the Brotherhood announced it would boycott the elections. Such a position impacted the Brotherhood's membership ranks: several of the old-guard defected, participating in the elections as independents.

Although the 1997 boycott did not close the door to cooperation between the regime and the Brotherhood, the relationship became tenser. At the same time, the internal debate within the Brotherhood became even more complex because of the division separating the centrists and the pro-Hamas right wing of the party. The closure of the Hamas office in Jordan by Jordanian authorities in 1999 only exacerbated the problem[8].

By early 2001, some Jordanian Islamists led the founding of the Islamic Centrist Party. Immediately licensed by the Jordanian government, this new party concentrated on criticizing what they considered extremism in religious ideas, supporting pluralism, and distancing itself from both the Brotherhood and IAF. Although the Islamic Centrist Party fell short of becoming the leading Islamist group in the country, its founding, along with the debate between moderates and hardliners within the IAF on which posture should have been taken with the government, showed that Jordanian mainstream political Islam was developing and transforming.

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[7] P. Robins, *A History of Jordan*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 186-188.

[8] Ibid., p. 200.

The decade before the 2011 protests passed according to a sort of recurring scenario. Internally, the Brotherhood continued to experience confrontations between conflicting political and ideological fronts. Defectors firmly stuck to their positions while doves and hawks kept on debating the strategy and tactics to be adopted. At the same time, the regime continued its policy of containment, leading to tensions in 2006 when the government took full control of the Islamic Center Charity Society, which had been previously managed by the Brotherhood[9]. In 2007, the Brotherhood doves succeeded in insisting on participation in the elections, but the Brotherhood won only six seats out of 110. This was the worst electoral result in its history, widely imputed to the regime's strategy of controlling and containing the Brotherhood.[10] In the short term, the moderates paid their price, losing the internal elections for the Shura Council. From this period forward, the confrontation between moderates and hard-liners increased, with the former demanding internal reforms and the latter blocking their requests.

In this framework, the Arab uprisings worked as a catalyst of change and transformation. Initially, the Brotherhood appeared to be inspired by its traditional strategy. On the one hand, it remained faithful to the boycott, calling one in both the 2010 (with the support of the doves) and 2013 parliamentary elections. On the other hand, it joined protests and demonstrations calling for political reforms and the revival of the 1952 constitution.[11] The combination of internal and regional factors amplified the internal debate over the nature of the needed reforms and the way of understanding the Brotherhood's role as a loyal opposition within the country.

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[9] D. Atzori, *Islamism and Globalisation in Jordan: The Muslim Brotherhood's Quest for Hegemony*, New York, Routledge, 2015, p. 71.

[10] M.S. Abu Rumman, "The Muslim Brotherhood in the 2007 Jordanian Parliamentary Elections: A Passing 'Political Setback' or Diminished Popularity?", Amman, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, November 2007.

[11] M. Yaghi and J.A. Clark, "Jordan: Evolving Activism in a Divided Society", in L. Khatib and E. Lust (eds.), *Taking to the Streets: The Transformation of Arab Activism*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014, p. 254.

In 2012, a major crisis hit the Brotherhood. In October, on the basis of a similar initiative already organized in 2008-2009 but blocked by the hard-liners, former IAF deputy secretary-general Ruhayl Garaibah and IAF foreign relations chief Nabil al-Kufahi convened a meeting at the Zamzam hotel launching the National Building Initiative[12]. Known since then as the Zamzam Initiative, it challenged the Brotherhood leadership's confrontational stance toward the regime with the aim of promoting participation, dialogue, and the notion of a civil state; namely, a call for a constitutional monarchy and an invitation to the Islamist sphere to accept pluralism in politics and society to promote visions of good governance and to embrace positions not solely related to Islamic concepts and values. At the outset, the initiative did not aim to defect from the association, but to achieve its internal reform. Nevertheless, the group gained the government's license to independently operate under given legal conditions. Inevitably, the reaction of the Brotherhood's core leadership was scathing and uncompromising. They accused Zamzam of being co-opted by the regime. At the same time, the association continued to participate in the Higher Coordination Committee of the Jordanian Opposition Parties, calling again for a boycott of the 2013 elections.

The strategy did not produce concrete results and soon internal rivalries arose with the changing geopolitical conditions, undermining the unity of the oppositions and shifting the Brotherhood's focus from the Jordanian political sphere to its internal affairs. Accordingly, the fall of Brotherhood-affiliated President Mohamed Morsi in Egypt, the intensification of the civil war in Syria, and, finally, the designation of the Brotherhood as a terrorist organization by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) complicated the Brotherhood's position both internally and in its relationship with the regime. Proof of this was the Brotherhood's decision to

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[12] N. Bondokji, "The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan: Time to Reform", Brookings Institution, 22 April 2015, p. 8.

expel members participating in the Zamzam Initiative.

The situation became even more complicated at the end of 2014, when the deputy head of the Muslim Brotherhood, Zaki Bani Irshayd, was arrested and sentenced to eighteen months in prison under Jordan's terrorism law for an article criticizing the UAE's decision to outlaw the association in the country[13]. During the same time, the organization of the Islamic State (IS) posted a video of the cruel assassination of the Jordanian Air Force pilot Muadh al-Kasasbeh, increasing the regime's concerns and suspicions about radicalization in the country. At the same time, the state concretely prohibited connections between the Brotherhood and Hamas. Finally, in the midst of these events Brotherhood Secretary-General Abd al-Majid Dhunaybat submitted a formal request to the government to register the Brotherhood as a political association under the new 2014 political parties law. This act represented the second and most impactful crisis that the Brotherhood had experienced in recent years.

Dhunaybat's request suddenly exposed all the contradictions existing within the association since the mid-1990s and increasingly after 2007. On the one hand, he affirmed the need for registration in order to conform to the new laws of the state because the Brotherhood was still registered only as a charitable society[14]. This act would have confirmed the cooperative relationship with the regime and hence protected the association. On the other hand, internal tensions escalated. The association denounced Dhunaybat's decision to proceed with registration as a maneuver of the regime because it had materialized without the Brotherhood leadership's consent.

In any case, Dhunaybat achieved his objective. The government immediately licensed the new association, registering it

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[13] M. Milton-Edwards, "Grappling with Islamism: Assessing Jordan's Evolving Approach", Analysis Paper, Brookings Institute Doha Center, no. 19, 30 September 2017, pp. 9-10.
[14] "Thunaibat Supreme Guide for Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan", *Ammon News*, 3 June 2015.

under the name of the Muslim Brotherhood Society (MBS) while the traditional organization lost all its properties and the permission to operate in the country[15]. Accordingly, without exerting force, the regime successfully took advantage of the Brotherhood's internal factionalism, contributing to shaping the Brotherhood's transformation and imposing precise red lines on it through its traditional strategy of bureaucratization.

The recognition of the MBS immediately pushed the old Brotherhood to announce its intention to separate from the Egyptian movement by amending its internal law in early 2016[16], with the aim of reorienting its political focus on Jordan's internal affairs and blocking defections. Nevertheless, the consequence of this split hit the association hard. In the same year, the Brotherhood's headquarters were closed, and its property was seized by the state[17].

In the short term, the splintering of the Brotherhood seems to be paying off for the regime, confirming the efficacy of its strategy. The recognition of the MBS appears to have marginalized hardliners, reinforcing the pragmatic and conciliatory current. The participation of all three groups (Zamzam, MBS, and IAF) in the 2016 parliamentary elections is the most compelling proof of this theory. Apparently, the presence of three distinct formations not only contains a part of Jordan's political Islam, but also diverts part of the activists' efforts toward internal competition. While in the 2014 elections the Brotherhood was shown to still have considerable support within the teachers' and students' unions at Jordan University, more recently the Brotherhood has lost control of other important unions, among them the engineers' union[18]. Finally, the splits have favored the

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[15] A. Alami, "Rift deepens within Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood", *Al Jazeera*, 17 August 2015.

[16] "Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood Split from Egyptian Parent Group", *The New Arab*, 16 February 2016.

[17] H. Abu Haniyeh, "Jordan's strategy to fragment the Muslim Brotherhood", *Middle East Eye*, 19 April 2016.

[18] M. Daoud, "Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood Loses Control of Powerful Union

transformation of a part of the Brotherhood's traditional approach toward politics, revising it according to the notion of a civil state and pluralist politics. On the basis of the principles of "no compulsion in religion" and of religious pluralism, the Zamzam Initiative and MBS have developed their own concept of political pluralism.

However, the fragmentation of the Jordan's mainstream political Islam in the country cannot be considered positive per se and it could bear hidden challenges for the regime in the long term. These divisions have dangerously fluctuated between the ideological and identity-communal divides. The politicization of East Bank and West Bank membership and their division on the basis of the subtle distinction between loyalists and opponents according to these categories not only reveals that the association has failed to overcome the communal divide, but also that it has fallen victim to it. Such an identity conflict can widen marginalization and isolation, especially for the new generation with Palestinian descent. Moreover, looking at the electoral results, the regime's divide-and-rule policies have favored the creation of new groups whose limited electoral results seems to stem from a lack of credibility and legitimacy.

The Salafist Landscape in Jordan

Today's Salafism can be described as a method, lifestyle, and network of informal groups focused on seeking religious truth and the integral practice of Islam as revealed by the Prophet Mohamed. Jordanian Salafism appears as a multi-vocal and manifold phenomenon. Although some of its core elements can be traced to the time of the Emirate in the early twentieth century in present-day Jordan, today's Salafism developed in Jordan during the 1980s when King Hussein allowed the Albanian Islamic scholar Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani to

after 26 years", *Arab News*, 6 May 2018.

return and reside within the country[19]. Accordingly, this origin makes Salafism in Jordan a foreign-inspired dynamic, a characteristic that remains true when considering its expansion during the 1990s and current developments[20].

The history of Salafism in Jordan can be divided into three distinct phases of expansion.

First, after the Iranian Revolution and the growth of Islamism in the region, the regime reconsidered al-Albani's apolitical interpretation of Islam and Muslim identity. After exiling him in the early 1980s, Jordan felt that al-Albani and his quietist Salafism might have suited the state's mechanisms of control and its divide-and-rule policies by introducing a competitor to the Brotherhood. Inspired by Saudi Arabian dynamics, quietist Salafism in Jordan fully endorsed an apolitical stance, recognized the legitimacy of the regime, relinquished any notion of entering the national political field, and was vocally critical of the Brotherhood's approach as well as mainstream political Islam. Under the precise limits imposed by the regime, Salafism developed a low-profile presence, expanding through informal networks[21]. Initially, it attracted adherents from the Palestinian-descent milieu and middle-income strata[22].

Secondly, during the 1990s and in particular after the Gulf War in 1991, the Salafist scene in Jordan began to transform, spreading out over the country. Two different streams of returnees from Afghanistan and from Kuwait changed Jordanian Salafism. Although initially an expressly apolitical phenomenon, it acquired political and militant dimensions. It was during this period that the current distinction between traditionalist and jihadist consolidated. Among the refugees arriving from Kuwait in 1991, Jordan witnessed the arrival of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi in 1992, the would-be leading

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[19] J. Wagemakers, *Salafism in Jordan: Political Islam in a Quietist Community*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 108-109.

[20] Ibid., p. 97.

[21] Q. Wiktorowicz (2001), p. 16.

[22] J. Wagemakers (2016), p. 116.

ideologue of the Salafi-jihadist movement in Jordan boasting a substantial international and regional audience. At the same time, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi returned to his country along with the so-called Afghan Jordanians, those who fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

The Jordanian Salafi community soon found in al-Maqdisi an ideological guide capable of reframing militant opposition toward Muslim regimes according to the Salafi approach[23]. In their understanding, jihad was not only legitimate against the enemies of Islam, but also in the fight against what they considered the apostasy of Muslim regimes. With the launch of the democratization process in the country and the 1994 peace treaty with Israel, the Jordanian regime inevitably became a target. Throughout the 1990s, various Salafi-jihadist groups tried to plot attacks in the Kingdom[24]. Al-Maqdisi gathered young Salafists around him, including al-Zarqawi, giving birth to an informal organization known as Bayat al-Imam that plotted attacks against Israeli targets. This informal group was easily discovered by the Jordanian secret service and both leaders were sentenced to fifteen years of prison.

Although Salafi-jihadists did not represent an existential threat to Jordan during the 1990s, their appearance and development contributed to diversifying political Islam in the country.

The third phase began in 1999. With Abdullah II's ascension to the throne, two important events contributed to transforming Salafism in Jordan. On the one hand, the death of al-Albani left traditionalists without their guide. The regime immediately activated its traditional strategy of control, promoting the institutionalization of al-Albani's informal network. The foundation of the Imam al-Albani Center achieved control of traditionalists, officially organizing their network under recognized leadership. As in the past, the regime considered traditionalists a strategic

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[23] Ibid., p. 181.

[24] Q. Wiktorowicz, "The Salafi Movement in Jordan", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2000, pp. 219-240.

resource to limit the Brotherhood's autonomy. On the other, in 1999 both al-Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi were granted amnesty and released. Al-Zarqawi immediately left for Afghanistan, where he made contacts with al-Qaeda thanks to the mediation of Abu Qatada, an alleged al-Qaeda operative based in London at that time. He soon returned to the region with the aim of creating his own organization, primarily involving Palestinians and Jordanians. With the goal of overthrowing the Jordanian monarchy, during 1999 he unsuccessfully planned a series of attacks on the Amman Radisson Hotel (housing Israeli and American officials) and tourist sites in the country. After the failure of the so-called "Millennium Plot", al-Zarqawi and his group went underground until 2001. From 2002 to 2005 his name returned to the fore as the founder of the group Tawhid wal-Jihad in Iraq. He was first believed to be behind the assassination of the US diplomat Lawrence Foley, and then was discovered to be instigating a plot to unleash chemical attacks in Amman in 2004. Finally, in 2005 his group carried out three simultaneous bombings in Amman, killing sixty people[25].

Beyond these events, by the end of the 1990s the Salafi-jihadist scene in Jordan was divided between al-Maqdisi and al-Zarqawi supporters. While the latter was focusing on jihad and the need to immediately take up arms, the former sought to lead Salafi-jihadists by establishing a code of conduct to carry out jihad in a legitimate, rather than counterproductive, Islamic manner. In essence, al-Maqdisi sought to re-orient Salafi-jihadists, persuading them that there are conditions in jihad, and that where a state cannot be defeated, as in the case of Jordan, efforts should be directed toward creating a critical mass in society[26]. Therefore, while al-Zarqawi was concentrating on enlisting Palestinians and Jordanians for his jihad, al-Maqdisi was focusing on enlarging and guiding the movement within the Kingdom, suggesting a quietist strategy to develop

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[25] A. Speckhard, "The Jihad in Jordan: Drivers of Radicalization into Violent Extremism in Jordan", *ICSVE Research Reports*, 25 March 2017, p. 18.

[26] J. Wagemakers (2016), pp. 182-183.

and consolidate. During these years, al-Maqdisi's group was dominant.

However, the Arab uprisings and especially the civil war in Syria widened these internal rifts, making them more complex and blurred. Salafi-jihadists joined the protests in March 2011, but it soon became clear that their motives were different from those of secular activists and mainstream Islamists. Those who took to the streets concentrated on calling for the integral application of Islamic laws and the release of their brethren in jail, including al-Maqdisi who was arrested in 2010[27]. At the same time, the traditionalists criticized protests in Egypt and with Ali al-Halabi, former student of al-Albani and senior Salafi sheikh, officially took up a position against those in Amman[28]. A few weeks later, Salafi-jihadists first attacked traditionalists and then clashed with the police in Zarqa. At this point, al-Maqdisi invited Salafi-jihadists to desist from protesting with the aim of establishing dialogue with the government. Similarly, Abu Sayyaf, a local leader from Maan, tried to develop contacts with the Brotherhood to create a shared council dedicated to Islamic law and the issue of prisoners[29]. Neither of these two initiatives met with concrete successes, with the sole exception of some prisoner releases on an individual basis. At this point, the traditional tactic of co-optation seemed to produce effects and, in fact, until 2014 the jihadist threat to the Kingdom was considered manageable.

Nevertheless, the acceleration of the Syrian civil war and, in particular, the emergence of Jabhat al-Nusra in 2012 had a strong impact on Jordanian Salafi-jihadists. In the short term, the war in Syria seemed to be promising a positive reconfiguration of their presence in the country, bridging the gap between al-Maqdisi and al-Zarqawi supporters. It could have provided a concrete field of battle for practicing jihad while decreasing

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[27] K.H. Sowell, "Jordanian Salafism and the Jihad in Syria", *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Hudson Institute, 12 March 2015.

[28] K. H. Sowell (2015).

[29] Ibid.

tensions within the Kingdom according to al-Maqdisi's strategy[30]. Accordingly, an increasing number of Jordanians left for Syria, joining Nusra, while at home Salafi-jihadist leaders became increasingly vocal in supporting the fight against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad[31]. However, in 2013 the announcement of the creation of IS and the subsequent split with Nusra drastically altered such a modus vivendi, sowing new factionalism and complicating the old divide between al-Zarqawists (pro-IS) and al-Maqdisi supporters (pro-Nusra). Initially, during 2014, strong criticism of IS by al-Maqdisi's and Abu Qatada's (who returned to Jordan in 2013) seemed to revive the past dialectic, seen prior to the death of al-Zarqawi in 2006. By the end of 2016, support for Nusra began to be transferred to IS, causing internal fragmentation in al-Maqdisi's camp and the crumbling of his authority. In this framework, his release from jail after having criticized IS was of no benefit. The announcement of allegiance to IS by Saad Hunayti, earlier appointed by Abu Qatada as spokesperson for the Salafi-jihadists in Jordan[32], was proof of growing internal dissension and of the weakening of the al-Maqdisi faction.

The Arab uprisings and Syrian civil war thus deeply transformed the internal balance of Salafism within the country. On the one hand, pro-government Salafists have almost disappeared from the scene, failing to influence events and essentially neutralizing part of the regime's expected positive effects of their institutionalization. On the other hand, Salafi-jihadists appear even more fragmented than they were before. Beyond the old division between al-Maqdisi and al-Zarqawi supporters, the civil war in Syria has severely divided the former group, reducing the number of al-Maqdisi followers and undermining part of his credibility.

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[30] K.H. Sowell (2015); J. Wagemakers, "Jihadi-Salafism in Jordan and the Syrian Conflict: Divisions Overcome Unity", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2018, p. 192.

[31] M. Milton-Edwards (2017), p. 14.

[32] K.H. Sowell (2015).

Today's Salafism in Jordan deserves careful examination, in particular the case of Salafi-jihadists. Although Salafism cannot be considered a mass movement in the Kingdom, with an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 followers[33], it is an informal movement rooted all over the country with East Bank youth increasingly becoming followers. Considering the importance of rural activism during the protests in the country, this data introduces further proof that suggests that the traditional base of Hashemite support is in transformation. Adherents to this Salafi-jihadist trend can be found in al-Rusayfa, al-Zarqa, al-Salt, Irbid and Maan[34]. Moreover, Salafi-jihadists can count on the presence of two major theorists (al-Maqdisi and al-Qatada) and on a series of charismatic local personalities. It has been estimated that an average of 3,000 Jordanians left for Syria[35], and the series of counterterrorism operations and attacks between 2015 and 2016 proved that they are no longer an easily manageable phenomenon.

Conclusion

The relationship between the state and religion has always been a core element in the state-building process of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The Hashemite regime has actively engaged local religious dimensions, defining part of its hierarchies, spheres, and boundaries through its management and integration. Islam has been one of the focal points for the Hashemite regime's strategy to consolidate its rule and legitimacy. More recently, Jordan has presented itself as the beacon of moderate Islam in the Middle East and as a model to contrast manipulations and extreme politicizations of the Islamic message developed by radical Islamists and jihadist groups.

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[33] J. Wagemakers (2018), p. 193.

[34] Ibid., p. 195.

[35] "Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq", The Soufan Group, December 2015.

This strategy has widely proved successful. In fact, with the exception of a non-negligible component of Salafi-jihadists, most of the Jordanian Islamist actors continue to be not only peaceful and non-violent at the domestic level, but they also recognize the legitimacy of the Hashemite state and the Crown. Considering the Muslim Brotherhood's involvement in the recent protests, the association has accepted to frame its opposition, asking for reforms of the monarchy instead of an overturn of the Jordanian political system. In this framework, the rise of different currents of Salafism in the country represents one of the most important developments in the recent history of the Kingdom and its Islamic sphere. Salafism in the country is an expanding, multifaceted phenomenon that manifests in different approaches from apolitical-traditionalists to Salafi-jihadists. While the Brotherhood has divided into different groups competing for the leadership of mainstream political Islam in the country, Salafism in Jordan is increasingly replacing the Brotherhood's presence both in many poor and middle class urban districts and in the East Bank rural hinterlands.

PART IV
ENERGY

11. The Geopolitics of Eastern Mediterranean Energy

Simone Tagliapietra

Over the last decade, the Eastern Mediterranean has emerged as a potential world-class natural gas producing region. This new scenario progressively materialized as natural gas fields were successively discovered offshore of Israel, Cyprus, and Egypt (Table 1 and Figure 1). These developments soon impacted geopolitical discussions as regional governments, international organizations, energy analysts, and international relations scholars advocated using the newly-discovered natural gas resources as a tool to promote regional cooperation and peace[1]. However, several lines of conflict – such as the long-lasting dispute concerning the island of Cyprus – make the exploitation of Eastern Mediterranean natural gas resources a major geopolitical issue. This chapter seeks to provide a concise overview of Eastern Mediterranean natural gas developments in order to assess the related geopolitical challenges and opportunities.

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[1] S. Tagliapietra, *Energy Relations in the Euro-Mediterranean: A Political Economy Perspective*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

TAB. 1 - MAIN RECENT GAS DISCOVERIES IN OFFSHORE
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Gas field	Country	Gross mean resources (Bcm)	Discovery
Tamar	Israel	280	2009
Leviathan	Israel	620	2010
Aphrodite	Cyprus	140	2011
Zohr	Egypt	850	2015
Calypso	Cyprus	To be defined	2018

FIG. 1 - GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF THE MAIN NATURAL GAS
DISCOVERIES IN OFFSHORE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN
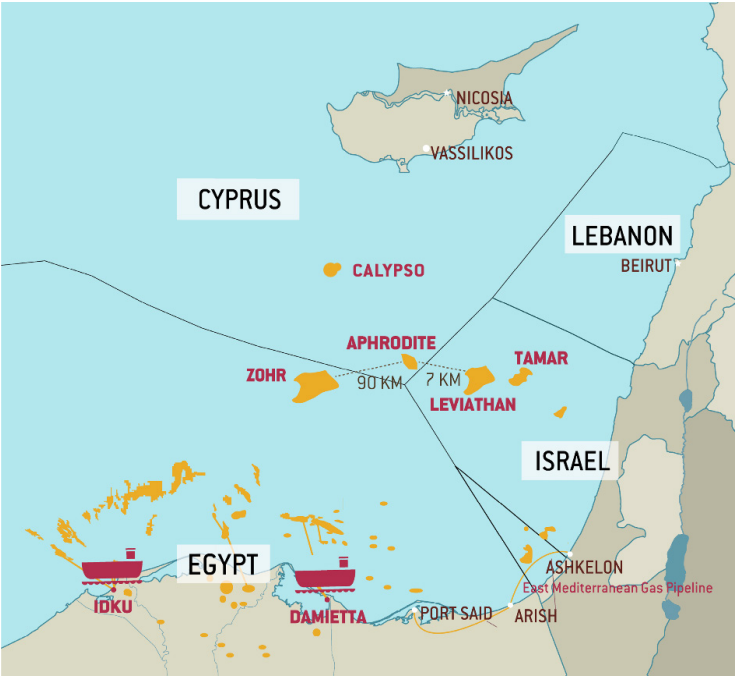
An Overview of Eastern Mediterranean Natural Gas Developments

The Eastern Mediterranean region entered the world energy scene in 2009 when the Houston-based oil and natural gas exploration and production company Noble Energy announced the discovery of the Tamar natural gas field in offshore Israel. Albeit relatively small with 280 billion cubic metres (Bcm) of gross mean resources, the discovery sparked considerable hopes about the region's natural gas potential. These hopes increased between 2010 and 2011 when the same company discovered new natural gas fields offshore of Israel (Leviathan, with gross mean resources of 620 Bcm) and Cyprus (Aphrodite, with gross mean resources of 140 Bcm).

This wave of natural gas discoveries paved the way for the formulation of a myriad of natural gas export projects, both as pipelines and liquified natural gas (LNG) plants: i) Israel-Jordan and Israel-Gaza pipelines; ii) an Israel-Cyprus-Greece pipeline; iii) an Israel-Turkey pipeline; iv) an Israel-Cyprus-Greece electricity interconnector; v) an LNG plant at Vasilikos; vi) LNG plants in Israel; and vii) Israel-Cyprus pipelines to existing Egyptian LNG plants (Figure 2)[2].

Fig. 2 - Eastern Mediterranean main natural nas export projects

- The Israel-Jordan and Israel-Gaza pipelines
- The Israel-Cyprus-Greece pipeline
- The Israel-Turkey pipeline
- The Israel-Greece-Cyprus interconnector
- The LNG plant at Vasilikos
- The (F)LNG plants in Israel
- The Israel-Cyprus pipelines to Egypt's LNG

[2] For an in-depth discussion of these projects, please refer to: S. Tagliapietra, "Energy: a shaping factor for regional stability in the Eastern Mediterranean?", Study for the Directorate General for External Policies, European Parliament, 2017.

This wave of discoveries also ignited extensive discussions within both Israel and Cyprus on how to monetize the newly-discovered resources. In Israel, the government decided to allow a prompt exploitation of the Tamar field to supply the country's domestic natural gas market. The government also established an inter-ministerial committee known as Tzemach Committee to examine international best practices concerning natural gas resources to better understand the various policy options (notably for the major Leviathan field). The committee concluded that, in the case of Israel, it would be appropriate to give preference to supplying the domestic economy, exporting no more than 500 Bcm of existing and prospective natural gas resources by 2037. Taking into consideration this policy recommendation, the Israeli government decided in 2013 to devote 60 percent of the country's natural gas resources to the domestic economy in order to enhance the security of Israel's energy supply for at least thirty years.

By providing a clear long-term strategy, this decision could have facilitated investments and therefore led to rapid natural gas production and soon thereafter the export phase. However, a high-level political dispute started in 2012 between the government and the country's antitrust authority over an alleged monopoly in the management of the country's natural gas resources. This institutional dispute led to the resignation of both the antitrust chief and the minister of the economy in 2015 and to the government's unprecedented use of a special clause of the country's antitrust law allowing it to circumvent the antitrust authority for reasons of national security[3]. In this context of political uncertainty, some international investors decided not to proceed with their investment plans for the country's natural gas sector. This was notably the case of the Australian LNG company Woodside Petroleum, which in 2014 backed out of a major deal that would have allowed a quick entrance of Leviathan into the global natural gas markets. After these

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[3] Ibid.

major delays, Israel's natural gas production and export outlook improved in 2017 when a final investment decision for the development of the first phase of Leviathan was reached by Noble Energy and other companies (Delek Drilling, Avner Oil Exploration, and Ratio Oil Exploration) to produce 12 Bcm per year of natural gas starting in 2019.[4]

While in Israel the development of natural gas resources has been delayed for political reasons, in Cyprus natural gas exploitation has been delayed by geology itself. Due to its internal economic crisis, the government of the Republic of Cyprus strongly pushed for a quick monetization of the Aphrodite field since its discovery in 2011. However, hopes for a rapid development of the field faded in 2013 as the initial estimation of gross mean resources at Aphrodite was downgraded by Noble Energy from 220 Bcm to 140 Bcm. Further bad news for the country successively came between 2014 and 2015 as the Italian energy company Eni did not find exploitable natural gas resources in two exploratory wells drilled offshore the island. After these disappointing developments, the country's hopes were renewed in 2018 when Eni announced the discovery of a new natural gas field, Calypso, offshore of the country; however, its resources must still be estimated.

The developments regarding natural gas in Israel and Cyprus suggested for both political and geological reasons that initial hopes about the Eastern Mediterranean becoming a world-class natural gas producing region would not materialize. However, a major game-changer occurred in 2015: Eni's discovery of the Zohr natural gas field in offshore Egypt. With 850 Bcm of natural gas resources, Zohr is by far the largest natural gas discovery ever made in the Mediterranean. This discovery was heralded as a blessing to Egypt since the country's natural gas production decreased significantly in recent years while domestic demand grew strongly and persistently. This imbalance is clearly illustrated by Egypt's LNG exports, which dropped from 15 Bcm

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[4] Delek Group, *Leviathan Final Investment Decision*, Press Release, 23 February 2017.

per year in 2005 to zero in 2014, leaving the country's two LNG plants – Idku and Damietta – completely idle. With a potential twenty-year plateau production level of 20-30 Bcm per year, Zohr thus represents major potential relief for Egypt's strained natural gas situation.

However, Zohr also represents a regional game-changer for at least two reasons. First, it is the initial discovery in a previously unexploited geological formation, and for this reason it could pave the way for new discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean. For instance, the Calypso field discovered by Eni in 2018 off-shore of Cyprus is a Zohr-like geological formation. Moreover, Zohr could function as a catalyst for the creation of a regional natural gas hub – a joint export route, via existing Egyptian LNG facilities, of Egyptian, Israeli, and Cypriot natural gas – that would enable the Eastern Mediterranean to become a natural gas exporting region by the mid-2020s. Given this prospect, it is useful to examine the challenges and the opportunities involved in developing Eastern Mediterranean natural gas resources.

Developing Eastern Mediterranean Natural Gas: The Challenges

As stated earlier, the idea of fostering regional stability in the Eastern Mediterranean through energy cooperation has been promoted by many sides on the basis of various arguments. Just to provide a taste of this discussion, some examples are outlined below.

In November 2016, US Ambassador to Israel Daniel B. Shapiro declared:

> In addition to the economic benefits, I believe that Israel and other Eastern Mediterranean countries could play seller and buyer roles that will promote understanding. I'm sure many of you have a relationship with a corner grocer, a mechanic or a baker that you regularly buy from. After a while your

interactions take on more than just the exchange of money for a good but you get to know that other person. They ask about your family and you do the same. In some cases, these persons become your friends and you become a loyal client because you know that a seller/client relationship based on trust is valuable. With natural gas sales, likewise, there is the potential to build greater understanding and trust. I would go further and say: Natural gas has the potential to change the geopolitical landscape in the Eastern Mediterranean for the better. Discoveries offshore Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, and potentially Lebanon have already redefined regional relationships and will continue to be a catalyst for increased economic and political cooperation through interconnection and integration[5].

In February 2016, the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Nicos Anastasiades, declared that "energy cooperation in the region can transform the Eastern Mediterranean into a pillar of stability, security and peace and be a decisive factor in achieving energy security for the EU (European Union]"[6].

In January 2014, former US Ambassador to Azerbaijan Matthew Bryza stressed the potential role of new regional gas discoveries to contribute to the reestablishment of Israel-Turkey relations: "Building an Israel-Turkey pipeline connected to a Cyprus LNG terminal offers strategic opportunities that transcend economics, including a chance for Israel and Turkey to restore their strategic partnership. It would also push Turkey to reach an agreement on the Cyprus question, removing a 40-year irritant in relations with Europe and re-energising Turkey's flagging efforts to join the EU. The US, working with the EU, should help to shape this future"[7].

In November 2013, then-Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs at the US Department of State,

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[5] US Embassy in Israel, "Remarks by former Ambassador Dan Shapiro at the Israel Energy & Business Convention", 22 November 2016.

[6] "E. Mediterranean gas could help unify, stabilize region, Greek Cypriot leader Anastasiades says", *Daily Sabah,* 25 February 2016.

[7] M. Bryza, "Israel-Turkey Pipeline Can Fix Eastern Mediterranean", Bloomberg, 20 January 2014.

Victoria Nuland, also pointed out the new gas discoveries' potential to contribute to the solution of the long-lasting Cyprus issue: "With the discovery of significant gas resources off Cyprus […] gas could play as important a role in healing the island's divisions as the coal and steel industry played in 1949 between France and Germany"[8].

Such hopes were founded on the assumption that, in general terms, energy dynamics are not strictly intertwined with the economic and geopolitical contexts in which they occur. However, the probability of seeing new Eastern Mediterranean natural gas discoveries functioning as leverage for regional political stability appears to be limited. This is mainly due to the simple fact that natural gas reserves discovered so far are still too limited in size to overcome the region's profound geopolitical rifts. In some cases, new natural gas discoveries have further irritated some of the established geopolitical tensions in the region, such as the Cyprus issue.

In this vein, it should be recalled that Turkey notified the United Nations in 2004 that it does not recognize the 2003 treaty between the Republic of Cyprus and Egypt for the delimitation of their exclusive economic zones (EEZs), claiming that delimitations offshore of Cyprus should be agreed upon by all states in the region (i.e., including Turkey), based on the principle of equity[9]. This claim is, of course, related to the Cyprus issue and the proclamation of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in 1983 that the United Nations declared legally invalid and that only Turkey recognized[10].

Then the Republic of Cyprus awarded the first round of exploration licenses in 2011, both Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus immediately objected. They claim that the

[8] B. Shaffer, "Can New Energy Supplies Bring Peace?", *Policy Brief: Mediterranean Policy Program,* The German Marshall Fund, 2014.

[9] United Nations, General Assembly, *Law of the Sea: Bulletin no. 54*, Turkish information note No. 2004/Turkuno DT/4739 (2 March 2004), p. 127.

[10] A. Comfort, "Turkey and the problem of the recognition of Cyprus, Brussels, Policy Department", European Parliament, 2005.

Republic of Cyprus does not have the authority to make decisions concerning the island's natural resources until a settlement of the decades-old Cyprus issue is made. In response to the offshore drilling carried out by the Republic of Cyprus in its offshore EEZ, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus commissioned Turkish Petroleum (TPAO) in late 2014 to perform the exploration of offshore areas in Northern Cyprus. TPAO sent the seismic vessel Barbaros Hayreddin Pasa into Cypriot waters, which soon became another stumbling block in the already complicated Cyprus reunification talks that began in early 2014. Tensions in the area intensified in February 2018 when five Turkish warships stopped an Eni drillship that was heading toward the southeast waters of Cyprus to carry out gas exploration activities. The Turkish warships threatened a collision with the drillship, which was then forced to turn back and ultimately moved toward Morocco to carry out other exploration activities there[11]. This event triggered a diplomatic standoff between the Republic of Cyprus, the European Union, and Turkey, underscoring once again the high level of tension in Cyprus over competing claims for offshore resources.

Both the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas and customary rules of international law provide a number of pathways for the peaceful settlement of such maritime boundary issues[12]. However, states should behave in good faith in order to reach such delimitation agreements. Until the Cyprus dispute is resolved, there cannot be a full and peaceful exploitation of the island's natural gas resources.

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[11] Reuters, "Eni says staying in Cyprus despite island's standoff with Turkey", 25 April 2018.

[12] C.R. Patibandla, *Law of the Sea, Settlement of Disputes*, Oxford Public International Law, March 2011.

Developing Eastern Mediterranean Natural Gas: The Opportunities

As previously noted, Zohr represents a major game-changer for Eastern Mediterranean natural gas prospects in view of its potential role as a catalyst to create a regional natural gas hub that combines the resources of Egypt, Israel, and Cyprus. This vision accelerated in February 2018 when Egypt signed a historic natural gas sales deal with Israel[13]. The companies operating the Leviathan field – Noble Energy and Delek – signed in February 2018 a deal to supply the private Egyptian firm Dolphinus Holdings with up to 700 million cubic feet of natural gas from the end of 2019 onward. The natural gas sales from Leviathan is expected to supply Egyptian domestic industrial petrochemical customers as well as power generation, despite Egypt's petroleum ministry forecasting natural gas self-sufficiency by the second half of this year. The deal is more solid than the letter of intent that Noble Energy and Delek signed in November 2015 with Dolphinus to supply 4 Bcm per year of gas from Leviathan for ten to fifteen years. A big question remains about how the natural gas will be transported from Israel to Egypt, with Noble and Delek suggesting they could reverse the flow of the existing offline El Arish-Ashkelon Pipeline. Two other options are being examined: 1) a new pipeline through Jordan or 2) a new pipeline from Israel to Egypt to be constructed in Nitzana in the south of the country. The identification of a workable export route will be key to the success of the deal. Furthermore, two other factors will be significant: the pricing of the natural gas and the resolution of a dispute ongoing since 2015 between Israel's national electric company (IEC) and Egypt. Egypt still owes IEC around $1.8 billion in damages related to Egypt's 2012 unilateral halting of natural gas exports via the El Arish-Ashkelon Pipeline following the revolution.

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[13] Reuters, "Egyptian firm to buy $15 billion of Israeli natural gas", 19 February 2018.

Utilizing the existing Egyptian LNG infrastructure for the export of Eastern Mediterranean natural gas would have a major added value: flexibility. In a geopolitically volatile region such as the Eastern Mediterranean, committing to new costly and long-term energy infrastructure might strike international energy companies as too risky. However, connecting offshore natural gas fields to the existing LNG infrastructure in Egypt could represent a "cheap and quick solution" for the monetization of regional resources[14].

For Israel and Cyprus, cooperating with Egypt seems to be the most practical option to export their natural gas resources. Instead of building new, expensive export infrastructures, bringing together an underused and scalable export infrastructure with several promising fields could be the key to unlocking untapped regional potential.

A joint regional export scheme via Egypt's LNG facilities could also provide a first opportunity to test natural gas cooperation between Egypt, Israel, and Cyprus. Such cooperation could eventually be expanded in the future with the construction of a pipeline connecting Israel, Cyprus, Greece, and Italy should new natural gas resources be discovered in the region and should natural gas demand in Europe justify the construction of additional infrastructure.

For Europe and the United States, such a development would be beneficial for both energy and foreign policy considerations. In energy terms, the joint exploitation of Eastern Mediterranean gas resources could provide a more secure energy supply to regional countries and Europe while also contributing to the development of more sustainable energy systems based on the complementarity of natural gas and renewable energy sources. Since solar and wind energy sources are intermittent, natural gas is a vital component to ensure the security and the competitiveness of regional power generation systems. Furthermore, it

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[14] S. Tagliapietra, "Energy: a shaping factor for regional stability in the Eastern Mediterranean?", Study for the Directorate General for External Policies, European Parliament, 2017.

should be noted that various countries in the region still use oil for power generation. Replacing this fuel with cleaner natural gas and renewables would represent an important step toward achieving a sustainable energy future in the region. In terms of foreign policy, even if Eastern Mediterranean natural gas coop-eration does not function as a catalyst for improving regional political stability, it certainly represents one of the few topics that could compel that parties involved to engage in sensible regional dialogue.

Acknowledgments

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